

**United Nations Environment Programme**

# **Evaluation Policy**

**Evaluation Office**

**September 2009**



**UNEP**



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## Acronyms

CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CSS	Corporate Services Section
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EA	Expected Accomplishments
EO	Evaluation Office
GC	Governing Council
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
MTS	Medium Term Strategy
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PoW	Programme of Work
QAS	Quality Assurance Section
RMS	Resource Mobilization Section
SMT	Senior Management Team
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WB	World Bank

## I. Summary and Overview

This document presents the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Evaluation policy and the strategy for its implementation. It explains the objectives, roles and functions of evaluation within UNEP, defines the institutional framework within which it operates and outlines the general processes by which it is operationalized. This evaluation policy is consistent with the United Nations System Norms and Standards<sup>1</sup> for Evaluation approved by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

This policy reflects UNEP's approach to evaluating the organization's performance based on its Medium Term Strategy. UNEP's evaluations will focus on results. UNEP has adopted an approach to evaluation where the emphasis is on UNEP's achievement at a programmatic level. The evaluation of UNEP's delivery of results in its Medium-Term Strategy is built upon the results of evaluations of the sub-programmes as embodied in the organization's Programmes of Work (PoW). Evaluations at a sub-programme level are informed by evaluations of each Expected Accomplishment in the PoW, which are informed by project level evaluations. UNEP senior management will ensure that findings from evaluations receive due attention from management at different levels in the organization and that lessons learned are integrated into programme and project design.

In addition there will be enhanced attention to evaluating the implementation of programme activities through assessments of the quality of supervision. Effective supervision requires the development of supervision plans that place emphasis on results-based management coupled with regular assessment of progress of implementation with candid progress ratings.<sup>2</sup>

The roles and responsibilities for evaluation in UNEP are summarized below:

- The Executive Director is responsible for managing the evaluation function, providing adequate resources for the evaluation function, approving the evaluation plan for onward submission to the Governing Council/ Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) as part of UNEP's Programme of Work and ensuring this policy is implemented;
- The Deputy Executive Director is responsible for overseeing that evaluation findings are fed back into future programming and budget planning and management through the work of Division Directors, the Quality Assurance Section (QAS), Corporate Services Section (CSS) and the Resource Mobilization Section (RMS);
- The Governing Council/ CPR will review the Biennial Evaluation Report encompassing the findings of UNEP evaluations. The Executive Director will ensure that a regular segment is created within the Governing Council agenda and the Head of the Evaluation Office will brief the Governing Council on evaluation findings and activities;
- The Evaluation Office is responsible for implementing the evaluation work plan by conducting and managing the preparation of independent evaluations at project, expected accomplishment and sub-programme levels. It ensures quality in evaluations conducted, provides analysis of findings and lessons for management, prepares the Biennial Evaluation Report and disseminates evaluation findings and

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1 The UNEG Norms and Standards (approved in 2005) require that all UN agencies develop an evaluation policy which adapts the generic norms and standards to agency circumstances.

2 The Evaluation Office will work with the Quality Assurance Section to provide guidance to staff on standards for achieving quality project supervision for programme implementation.

results. The Evaluation Office promotes the uptake of lessons and tracks compliance with evaluation recommendations;

- The Senior Management Team (SMT) reviews and discusses evaluations, approves evaluation management responses and ensures that findings are incorporated in the design and implementation of programme activities. The SMT is also responsible for providing input to the design of the evaluation plan and recommending areas for evaluation. Specifically, Division Directors are responsible for ensuring that accepted evaluation recommendations are implemented within their respective Divisions;
- Sub-programme Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that project evaluations are budgeted for. They also coordinate the review of evaluation reports and the preparation of management responses at the level of Expected Accomplishment and Sub-programme levels in consultation with Coordinating Divisions.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Mandate

1. The mandate for conducting evaluations in UNEP derives from several General Assembly Resolutions, summarized in the regulations and “Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation” (ST/SGB/20008 ). The rules require all UN programme activities to be evaluated. This mandate is further supported by a number of UNEP Governing Council decisions (75(iv), 83, 6/6/136. 13/1 and 14/1). These decisions authorize evaluation of UNEP activities, and require the development and continuous refinement of methodologies in collaboration with other UN entities and the reporting of evaluation activities to the Governing Council of the organization. The mandate for evaluations in UNEP covers all programmes and projects of the Environment Fund, related trust funds, earmarked contributions and projects implemented by UNEP under the Global Environment Facility and under partnership agreements.

## III. Policy Statement

2. Evaluations are meant to serve the twin organizational objectives of (i) enabling management to improve programmatic planning, implementation results, monitoring and reporting and (ii) providing substantive accountability to UNEP’s Governing Council, donors and the general public. It is the policy of the organization that the Evaluation Office shall be free to select evaluation subjects taking into account inputs from UNEP’s SMT, conduct evaluations and prepare clear, accurate, objective, uncompromising and uncensored reports without undue interference from any part of the organization. To ensure transparency, full disclosure will be a key guiding principle in UNEP evaluations. To that end, all evaluation reports prepared by the Evaluation Office will be made public.
3. It is the policy of UNEP to promote learning through discussion and wide dissemination of evaluation findings and lessons learned from programme/ project implementation and to ensure that relevant evaluation recommendations are implemented. UNEP will collaborate with other UN system organizations and external

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<sup>3</sup> A management response is a written reaction to the findings, recommendations and lessons of the evaluation. It indicates whether the recommendations are accepted or not, what actions will be taken to implement accepted recommendations and full justifications for the rejection of any recommendations.

partners to continuously refine methods for evaluations, set standards and guidelines<sup>4</sup> that reflect international best practice and promote their application within the organization.

#### **IV. Purpose and Scope**

4. Evaluations within the United Nations system are designed “to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the organization’s activities in relation to their objectives.<sup>5</sup>” They provide the basis for assessing the relevance, sustainability, quality and usefulness of outcomes of programme and project activities undertaken by the organization.
5. The main reasons for conducting evaluations of projects and programmes in UNEP are to:
  - enable senior management and project/ programme managers to demonstrate and measure performance;
  - identify where improvements can be made to design or delivery methods;
  - identify good practices and lessons for the future;
  - provide feedback for adaptive management and positive learning;
  - assess how UNEP’s activities have impacted environmental policy-making and management at the national, regional and global levels;
  - provide a means, through disclosure, for transparency in the way the organization implements its programme activities and uses its resources.

#### **V. Principles**

6. A number of principles guide evaluation within the United Nations.<sup>6</sup> Among the most important are: Learning, Accountability, Independence, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Credibility, Legitimacy, Relevance, Transparency, Ethics, Partnership, Disclosure and Impartiality.
7. This policy is guided mainly by four key principles, namely: Learning, Accountability, Independence and Ethics. These are discussed below:

##### **a) Learning**

8. Institutional learning from evaluations is a key principle upon which evaluation activities are based in UNEP. The learning function involves:
  - identification and timely dissemination of lessons from programme and project implementation;
  - development of useable relevant recommendations based on evaluation findings to improve operational performance;

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4 Full details of UNEP’s Evaluation methods and processes are specified in the “UNEP Evaluation Manual”.

5 ST/SGB/2000/8, “Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.

6 See “United Nations System Norms and Standards for Evaluation” approved by UNEG.

- promoting the uptake of evaluation findings and lessons into future design, implementation and management of its activities.

## **b) Accountability**

9. A primary purpose for conducting evaluations is to provide substantive accountability for the resources provided to the organization to implement its programme activities and the results from the implementation of these programmes. Results based management requires that the organization evaluates its performance against its Expected Accomplishments. For that reason, accountability is a core principle on which evaluations are based. Providing accountability through evaluation requires:
- the evaluation function in UNEP to be endowed with professional capacity;
  - management arrangements that allow for objective and unbiased evaluation and reporting;
  - sufficient resources to conduct rigorous analysis of policies, programmes and project activities;
  - assessment of the achievement of the results and impact of the organization’s programme activities in the context of those planned / expected (defined in POW/ MTS);
  - findings to be reported to the appropriate levels of decision-making within UNEP as well as to Governments and the public;
  - full public disclosure of evaluation findings.

## **c) Independence**

10. The extent to which the evaluation function needs to be independent has been addressed by the “United Nations System Norms and Standards”<sup>7</sup>. This policy subscribes to the concept of both organizational and behavioral independence for the evaluation function. The evaluation function is independent of operational sub-programmes to ensure freedom from undue influence and to facilitate objective assessment of programme and project activities without interference. Independence shall mean the freedom to:
- develop its work programme in collaboration with the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Division Directors, Sub-programme Coordinators and other relevant staff;
  - select evaluation subjects, including those suggested by senior management/ Governments;
  - develop Terms of Reference for evaluations, select evaluators and manage the resources allocated for evaluations within the organization without undue interference;
  - recruit evaluation consultants within the guidelines of the organization;
  - conduct evaluations without interference from senior management;
  - follow-up and report on management responses and the implementation of evaluation recommendations;
  - submit clear, accurate, objective uncompromising and uncensored reports to the senior management and relevant stakeholders without fear of recrimination or dismissal for such; and
  - publicly disclose evaluation findings.

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<sup>7</sup> “Norms of Evaluation in the UN System”, Norm 6, UNEG, 2005.

## **d) Ethical Considerations in UNEP Evaluations<sup>8</sup>**

11. This policy requires that Evaluation Office staff and evaluation consultants must have personal and professional integrity:
  - respect the right of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence;
  - ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source;
  - take care that those involved in evaluations have a chance to examine the statements attributed to them;
  - be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environments in which they work;
  - not have been involved in the process of development, implementation or supervision of the programmes, projects or policies being evaluated to avoid conflicts of interest;
  - be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender inequality;
  - discreetly report evidence of wrongdoing to the appropriate investigative body.

## **VI. Organization and Management of the Evaluation Function**

### **a) Functional location**

12. The Evaluation function in UNEP is located within the Executive Office and reports directly to the Executive Director.

### **b) Functional Responsibilities and Roles**

#### *Staffing of the Evaluation function*

13. The Executive Director ensures that within the resources available to the organization, adequate and qualified staff is recruited for the effective functioning of the Evaluation Office.

#### *Programme of Work*

14. The Governing Council approves the operational budget of the Evaluation Office by approving the budget proposed by UNEP management as part of the overall budget of the organization in its review of UNEP's Programme of Work.
15. The Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Division Directors, Sub-programme Coordinators and other senior staff will contribute to the implementation of the evaluation programme by ensuring that evaluations are provided for in the budgets of all projects/ programmes and will work with the Evaluation Office to identify potential activities for evaluation. The Evaluation Office shall prepare a biennial evaluation work plan that forms a part of UNEP's biennial PoW and Budget. The biennial evaluation work plan will be reviewed by the SMT and approved by the Executive Director.

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<sup>8</sup> This policy adheres to Section 11 of the "Norms of Evaluation and Standards 2.5 – 2.8" of the "Standards of Evaluation", UNEG, April 2005 and responds to the "United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights".

16. The Evaluation Office has responsibility for conducting evaluations of sub-programmes and projects as well as thematic evaluations and management studies within the organization. The predominant focus of UNEP evaluations is on the achievement of results and impacts. UNEP regards evaluation as a key component in effective results-based management. The Office will ensure that the quality of evaluations meets UN system and international standards and continue to refine methods for evaluations, set standards and guidelines for evaluations, and ensure that these are followed within the organization. To the extent possible, the Office will conduct joint evaluations with UNEP's partners and donors.
17. The Evaluation Office will also ensure that Sub-programme Coordinators, Coordinating Divisions and Project Managers and any partner agencies are aware of the requirements and the importance of evaluations and provide the required guidance, training and technical support for evaluations of UNEP activities. Where a project partner agency requests, UNEP may carry out a joint evaluation of a project in consultation with the partner agency's evaluation office.
18. While the final decision for recruiting evaluation consultants lies with the Evaluation Office, programme/project managers can suggest potential candidates. Sub-programme Coordinators, Coordinating Divisions and Project Managers have the responsibility of reviewing evaluation reports, sharing draft reports with the relevant partnering agencies for a project or programme framework and submitting comments to the Evaluation Office.
19. UNEP's SMT shall review key evaluation products including Sub-programme Evaluations, Management Studies and the Biennial Evaluation Reports and provide comments to the Evaluation Office.

## **VII. Evaluation Types and Products**

20. Evaluating UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) will involve systematic assessments of the Projects/ Programmes and Expected Accomplishments of the various Sub-programmes. Figure 1 below is a schematic representation of UNEP's evaluation system.

Types of evaluation will include:

### **a) Project Level Evaluations**

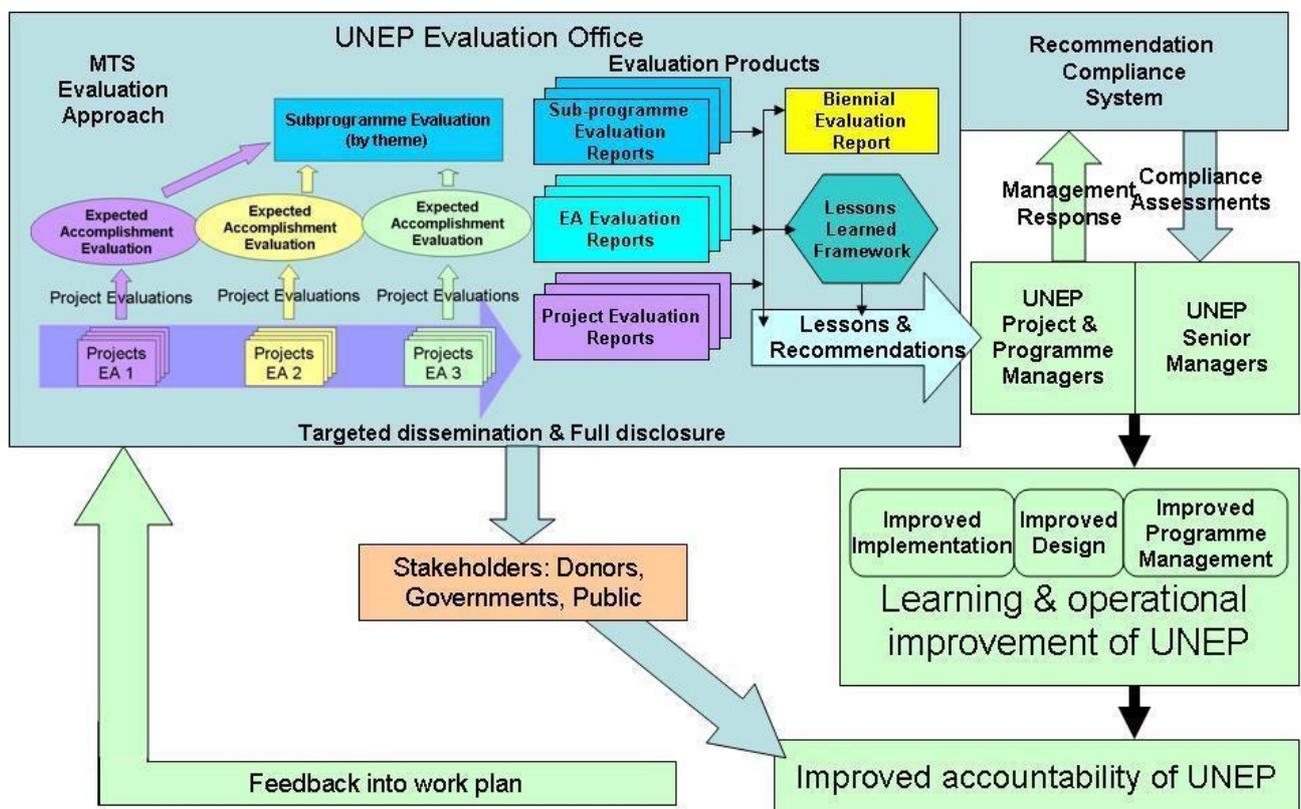
21. Mid-term evaluations are undertaken approximately half way through project implementation. These evaluations analyze whether a project is on track, what problems and challenges the project is encountering and which corrective actions are required. Mid-term evaluations may be conducted by the Evaluation Office where: a project is of key strategic importance to UNEP and at risk. Mid-term evaluations are otherwise only mandatory for projects that extend for the duration of the Medium-Term Strategy or longer. For projects of a shorter duration, the mid-term examination of a project's performance is viewed as an internal project management tool and is referred to as a mid-term review. For those projects, the responsibility for mid-term reviews rests with project/programme managers. Products: Mid Term Evaluation Reports, Recommendation Implementation Plans.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The agreed "evaluation implementation plan" specifies whether a recommendation has been accepted, how the recommendation will be implemented, who is responsible for its implementation, the date by which the implementation of the recommendation is expected to be completed, and what actions have already been taken (if any).

Terminal Evaluations of projects will be undertaken at their completion by independent evaluators that are contracted by the Evaluation Office. Project-level evaluations aim to assess project performance and determine the outcomes/ results stemming from the project/ activity cluster. They provide judgments on actual and potential results, their sustainability and the operational efficiency of implementation. To achieve this, evaluations will specifically focus on the ‘theory of change’ or ‘impact pathways’ used by the project and review evidence of actual or potential achievements along such ‘pathways’. Project-level evaluations also identify lessons of operational relevance for future project design and implementation. The Evaluation Office will apply quality control processes that assess performance ratings based on the evidence presented in the evaluation reports and make judgments on the quality of such reports in relation to international best practice. Project level evaluations will feed into the higher level evaluation of Expected Accomplishments. Products: Terminal Evaluation Reports, Management Response and Recommendation Implementation Plans, Synthesis Reviews of Project Outcomes to Impacts.

Figure 1. UNEP’s Evaluation System



## **b) Expected Accomplishment Evaluations**

22. Evaluations of the Expected Accomplishments (EA) within a sub-programme will be conducted immediately prior to, and provide essential input into, the subsequent evaluation of that sub-programme. The scope of an EA evaluation is defined by the projects and activities specified in the work programme as directly contributing to a specific EA. Such evaluations will attempt to determine and verify the role and performance of UNEP in achieving the higher-level results that are defined in a specific Expected Accomplishment. Expected Accomplishment evaluations will specifically focus on the ‘theory of change’ or ‘impact pathways’ used to link UNEP’s planned work to the desired results and document the evidence of actual (or potential) achievements, by UNEP and its partners, along such ‘pathways’. Where possible, these evaluations will attempt to establish the amount of such change that is attributable to the intervention. The EA evaluations will make use of monitoring data derived from the sub-programmes, from QAS, as well as other sources of information to determine the extent to which UNEP has progressed in accomplishing the objectives established in the MTS. Findings from EA evaluations will also feed into the design of subsequent programmes of work. Products: EA Evaluation Reports, Management Response and Recommendation Implementation Plans.

## **c) Quality of project supervision reviews**

23. Quality of Project Supervision Reviews will be conducted in collaboration with QAS with the aim of examining quality of project supervision throughout UNEP. QAS will provide guidance to project managers and their supervisors on norms and standards for project supervision. The goal is to enable feedback to Project/ Programme Managers in UNEP to ensure a consistently high quality in project supervision throughout the organization. The reviews will assess: the adequacy of project supervision plans, inputs and processes, the emphasis given to outcome monitoring (results-based project management), the realism/candour of project reporting, risk assessments and progress review, the quality of documentation of project supervision activities, and the adequacy of financial, administrative and other fiduciary aspects of project implementation supervision. Products: Project Supervision Review Sheets, Summative Project Supervision Review Reports, Management Response and Recommendation Implementation Plans.

## **d) Sub-programme Evaluations**

24. Over the period of an MTS, all sub-programmes will be evaluated. Each sub-programme evaluation will examine the achievement of results, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of the sub-programme. The sub-programme evaluations will make use of Expected Accomplishment evaluations to help assess the overall performance of the sub-programme at the results level. As UNEP’s thematic sub-programmes cut across the divisional structure, the coordination and cooperation among and between UNEP divisions and regional offices will be examined. This will include an assessment of the ‘complementarity’ of GEF projects that make contributions to sub-programme results.
25. The evaluations will also assess the efficiency and utility of collaborative and partnership arrangements with UN bodies, intergovernmental organizations, international, regional and national non-governmental organizations, scientific and environmental centers, private sector organizations, networks and groups. Products: Sub-programme Evaluation Reports, Management Response and Recommendation Implementation Plans, Evaluation Reports of Specific Partnership Arrangements.

## **e) Impact Evaluations**

26. Impact evaluations attempt to determine the entire range of effects of the programme/ project activity, including unforeseen and longer-term effects<sup>10</sup> as well as effects on people or environments outside the immediate target group/ area. They attempt to establish the amount of such change that is attributable to the intervention. The focus is on evaluating progress towards high-level goals and providing estimates of development impact. They are particularly useful in assessing the overall performance of a project/ programme in achieving long-term improvement in the quality of the environment and for assessing the sustainability of the impact against stated objectives. Impact evaluations are often expensive and are conducted on a selective basis with the objective of learning lessons, or demonstrating significant benefits in line with UNEP's strategic objectives. Post-project impact evaluations will be conducted on a selective basis with the aim of identifying UNEP's success in sustaining benefits several years after a project — or portfolio of projects — has been completed. Since the interventions considered in an impact evaluation are often quite specific, they will usually feed into EA and sub-programme evaluations. Products: Impact Evaluation Reports, Summary 'Impact Briefs' in electronic and / or printed formats.

## **f) Management studies**

27. Management studies will examine cross-cutting issues of special relevance to the entire organization. They will focus on management processes and aim to identify improvements in management practices, tools and internal dynamics. The specific areas for study may cover operational policies, strategies, partnerships, collaborative and partnership arrangements, funding modalities and networks. Products: Management Study Reports, Management Response and Recommendation Implementation Plans.

## **g) Meta-evaluation, synthesis and special studies**

28. At the end of each biennium the Evaluation Office will prepare a Biennial Evaluation Report. This report will summarize the performance of the organization through trends and patterns observed during the biennium from completed evaluations at all levels. The patterns and trends will be used to identify recommendations and lessons to be brought to the attention of, and discussed with, UNEP Senior Management. The report constitutes a document for the GC, and is disseminated to CPR members, national governments and UNEP staff. Products: Biennial Evaluation Reports, Regular updates of the Lessons Learned Framework, Evaluation Demand Surveys, Priority Setting Analyses of Evaluation Opportunities. Self Assessments and External Peer Reviews of the Performance of the Evaluation Function.

# **VIII. Reporting, Disclosure, Dissemination and Follow-Up**

## **a) Reporting and Disclosure**

29. The Evaluation Office will regularly report on the implementation of its work programme to the Executive Director and the SMT.
30. In accordance with GC 4/75 (1V), the Executive Director shall report to subsequent sessions of the

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10 There are often significant time lags for long term effects to become evident. Therefore impact evaluations often analyse interventions with causal effects that occur beyond the duration of a POW.

Governing Council on evaluations carried out in the organization. The Executive Director will ensure that a regular segment to discuss evaluation issues is created within the Governing Council/ CPR agenda and the Head of the Evaluation Office will brief the GC/ CPR on evaluation findings and activities.

31. After the completion of evaluations, reports and lessons are fully disclosed to all evaluation stakeholders and made publicly available on the UNEP evaluation web page.

## **b) Dissemination and follow-up**

32. The UNEP Secretariat, with the support of the Evaluation Office, shall develop an appropriate and efficient mechanism to enhance knowledge management and use evaluation findings, relevant lessons and good practices to improve programme and project delivery (e.g. interactive seminars, best practice guidelines, online repository of lessons learned).
33. The findings from evaluations will be discussed with relevant programme staff and senior management where specific recommendations will be reviewed and subsequently they will prepare a formal management response to the evaluation. Interactive discussions with evaluation stakeholders are essential for effective uptake of evaluation lessons. Compliance assessments for implementation of the accepted recommendations are prepared by the Evaluation Office and reported on a six-monthly basis to Senior Management.

<b>Evaluation Type</b>	<b>Key stakeholders for the discussion of recommendations and lessons</b>
Project Evaluations	Project/ Programme Managers, Partner institutions, QAS
Expected Accomplishment Evaluations	Sub-programme Coordinators, Project/ Programme Managers, Division Directors, QAS, CSS, RMS, Staff
Sub-programme Evaluations	Division Directors, Sub-programme Coordinators, QAS, CSS, RMS

34. Under the guidance of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director, members of UNEP's SMT have the overall responsibility for ensuring that evaluation recommendations are implemented and the lessons identified through evaluations are used to improve programme and project delivery.

## **IX. External Coordination and Peer Review of The Evaluation Function**

35. The Evaluation Office shall participate in the UNEG activities to keep abreast of progress and development in evaluation within the UN system and implement required policies, strategies and guidelines. The Evaluation Office will also maintain a close working relationship with the evaluation offices of other UN and affiliated organizations, the Global Environment Facility (GEF/EO) and multilateral and bilateral organizations (e.g. WB IEG, OECD/DAC Expert Group). The Evaluation Office will encourage its staff to proactively seek new knowledge in the field of evaluation through professional contacts within and outside the UN system.
36. To provide a mechanism to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of UNEP's evaluation function, this policy provides for periodic peer review by an independent external review team.<sup>11</sup> The decision to review the evaluation function of UNEP will be made by the Executive Director.

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<sup>11</sup> UNEG/ DAC provides a mechanism for professional peer review of evaluation functions in multilateral organizations.

## **X. Implementation of the Evaluation Policy**

This policy comes into force once approved by the Executive Director of UNEP.<sup>12</sup>

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12 The evaluation policy was formally approved by the UNEP Executive Director and Senior Management Team and became effective on 1st September 2009.



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