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# Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Principles: peer review among Evaluation practitioners

## Draft

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**Hosts : United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

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## Introduction and objectives

Ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in April 2016, WFP proposed to the Humanitarian Evaluation Interest Group (HEIG) to launch a first reflection around humanitarian principles. The aim of this work was to deepen understanding on how the four core Humanitarian Principles (HPs) are evaluated, highlighting best practices where available, as well as challenges and opportunities. With financial support from WFP and UNICEF, a team of consultants from The Konterra Group published a working paper published on the subject<sup>1</sup>.

The review concluded that there was limited common understanding within the sector, and sometimes within agencies, of the HPs in terms of concepts and implementation. Overall agencies are not prioritizing (indeed rarely addressing) evaluation against HPs, nor providing adequate guidance to evaluation managers and evaluators.

In July 2017, the HEIG (through WFP) produced a draft guidance aimed at helping practitioners reflect humanitarian principles in evaluation. Since this time however, the guidance has not been piloted, and the 2018 HEIG task team<sup>2</sup> has recently interviewed seven evaluation practitioners to get their reflections on perceived usefulness of the guide, as well as more general ideas for reflecting humanitarian principles in evaluations from both a practical and a design perspective.

This draft report lays out the key feedback from practitioners on the guide, providing suggestions for revisions to the final iteration in 2020, as well as suggestions on desirable content for a guide that reflects on HPs in evaluations. Feedback will be presented during the UNEG annual group meeting in Nairobi (May 2019), with the aim of discussing the suggested changes and agreeing on the next steps prior to finalizing the guide.

## Summary of Suggested Revisions

The proposed revisions to the guide are summarised in bullet points below.

- Rather than focus the guide on evaluating results against HPs or adherence to HPs as an end goal, the proposed purpose of the guide should be to provide practical tools to evaluators and evaluation managers for operationalizing and integrating HPs into standard evaluations, by linking these to OECD/DAC criteria.
- Evaluating humanitarian principles should not be the end goal, but rather a means to better understand issues around accountability, organizational positioning, coordination, competition, and synergy in a particular context.
- The target audience for the guide should be broadened to include all UNEG members rather than humanitarian actors alone. More specifically, the guide could be separated to target evaluation managers (focus on strategic evaluation questions) and the other focusing on evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> UNEG working paper (April 2016): Reflecting Humanitarian Principles in Evaluation, online available at: <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1862>

<sup>2</sup> The HEIG task team members represent WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA, with UNHCR acting as the co-convenor. This work falls under strategic objective 3, work area 2 of the HEIG work plan.

practitioners (provision of tools to conduct evaluations). The guide should cover all UNEG members including development agencies.

- HPs in evaluation should be used to understand the different roles and actions that agencies take on in a particular context, as a means of identifying added advantage and complementarity between agencies. The guide could go a step further and provide evaluators with tools to understand how driving factors (e.g. donor funding, political access, agency alignment to government) influence the way agencies apply HPs in their work. Evaluations that look at HPs should unpack trade-offs at different levels: how HPs are applied at the organizational vis-a-vis the policy/operational level.
- The guide should clearly separate substance from methodology, and should offer modules that practitioners can draw from. A lot of the information could be condensed and packaged into visual graphics to help readers understand possible linkages between HPs and OECD/DAC criteria, as well as trade-offs between principles as a result of contextual factors
- The task team should commission at least one of the original authors within the team of consultants tasked with revising the guide, in order to ensure foregone consultations are not lost.

## Peer Review Methodology

Members of the HEIG working group task team put forward a list of team leaders and evaluation managers with previous experience working on evaluations for their agencies. A total of 10 people were contacted, of which eight people agreed to schedule an interview (table 1 below). Task team members aimed to conduct the interviews in pairs, but time constraints and other work obligations limited the ability of all members to participate in the interviews equally.

Interviews were conducted in April 2019, and the co-convenor for the task team transcribed the interview notes and used a simple inductive colour coding methodology to analyse and identify cross-cutting thematic areas and suggested areas for revision to the guide. Both the interview tool and the qualitative dataset are enclosed as annexes to this document.

The co-convenor then used the findings from the dataset as inputs to provide feedback on each chapter of the guide, making sure they are in line with the suggested revisions and recommendations from practitioners.

*Table 1: List of evaluation practitioners interviewed by the HEIG*

	Interviewee name	Relevant evaluations managed	Agency commissioning evaluation
1	Fumika Ouchi	Afghanistan country programme evaluation	UNDP
2	Vijayalakshmi Vadivelu	3RP evaluation and Syria	UNDP
3	Elisa Calcaterra	Iraq country evaluation	UNDP
4	Julia Betts	CEE Syria	WFP (2018)

5	Nick Maunder	CPE Somalia; CPE SS, CEE Nigeria	WFP (2017-2019)
6	Katie Tong	Syria crisis response	UNFPA (2011-2018)
7	Alexander Mundt	L3 response Bangladesh	UNHCR (2018)
8	Jock Baker	L3 response DRC	UNHCR (2018)

## Proposed Revisions

Five key areas were identified through the analysis of interview data. The first three areas focus on higher level and strategic adaptations to the guide, while the last two areas focus on practical revisions to enhance the utility and uptake of the guide. The five areas are summarized below:

- i. Target audience and purpose
- ii. Contextualization of humanitarian principles
- iii. Trade-offs and access
- iv. Structure and design of the guide
- v. Methodology and content

## Purpose and Target Audience

The HEIG guide for evaluating HPs in its current form focuses on two distinct approaches to evaluating HPs: i) evaluating humanitarian action against HPs, and ii) evaluating agency adherence to humanitarian principles. The latter is used when agencies have formally committed to HPs in their intervention planning documents, so that these can be evaluated against explicit intended results. This approach is intended for evaluations with a specific focus on HPs and is termed *option 2* in the current guide. *Option 1* is appropriate in cases where there is no explicit reference to HPs in intervention planning documents, and is most likely to be the most commonly used terminology in evaluation Terms of Reference (ToRs) and reports. In this scenario, HPs provide the overarching normative framework under which UN agencies operate. One of the challenging aspects to this dual approach, is the fact that there is very little ‘appetite’ among UN agencies for option 1, making it less useful for practitioners, since agencies will rarely commission an evaluation that questions their adherence to HPs. The guide rightfully points out that adherence to HPs involves informal debates, discussions, and negotiations within and between UN agencies, their in-country leadership, the UN’s political leadership, and with governments and non-state actors. UN agencies may not want their internal decision making processes evaluated as this may reduce their future ability to negotiate access and flexibility.

A key suggestion for the revising the guide is to subsume both adherence to and evaluation against HPs, by linking HP evaluation to the OECD/DAC criteria, and integrating HP evaluation questions into more standard evaluations that look at effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, and sustainability of a programme or operation. **The proposed purpose of the guide should therefore be to provide practical tools to evaluators and evaluation managers for operationalizing and integrating HPs in standard**

**evaluations**, and should approach the evaluation of HPs as a sub-set of questions and/or criteria to be reflected on when conducting operational, programme, or thematic evaluations. **By adopting a HP lens, evaluations could shed light on key issues regarding organizational positioning, decision-making, coordination and complementarity, as well as access and accountability** (both upward and downward) in a particular context. There are clear linkages between the principles and evaluation criteria such as relevance, efficiency, and sustainability.

The guide does not explicitly mention who the intended users are e.g. evaluation managers or evaluation practitioners. Evaluation managers might be more interested in strategic questions around organizational positioning, decision-making, and programme effectiveness, while practitioners would find the guide more useful if it provided practical tools for carrying out evaluations that adequately capture how HPs are interpreted, implemented, and understood in different contexts. **Interviewees would suggest to clearly define the target audience, and perhaps separate the guide into two overall sections:** one focusing on evaluation managers (strategy) and the other focusing on evaluation practitioners (tools). The guide should cover all UNEG members including development agencies.

The term ‘humanitarian principles’ is perhaps a little confining to humanitarian action, while the principles are relevant and applicable to development agencies as well. Interviewees from UNDP were of the opinion that the guide was only focused on evaluating humanitarian action, and that this **scope should be broadened to include other aid sectors as well, in particular the development sector**. Reference is made to Security Council resolution 1894 (S/RES/1894), which underscores the importance of upholding humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence for all sectors of the UN system. Furthermore, the guide needs to reflect more deeply on IASC messages around the humanitarian-development nexus. Against the back drop of the SDGs—with the promise of leaving no one behind, ending needs by reducing risks and vulnerabilities is now a shared commitment within the UN and the IASC, particularly in protracted emergency settings where the need for sustainable solutions increasingly blurs the lines between humanitarian and development efforts.

## Contextualization of Humanitarian Principles

Although the guide offers some reflection on the importance of a political economy analysis and stakeholder mapping to understand the context in which agencies operate, **the guide could go a step further and provide evaluators with tools to understand how driving factors (e.g. donor funding, political access, agency alignment to government) influence the way agencies apply HPs in their work**. HPs are defined in a policy vacuum, and do not reflect context: limitations or facilitating factors that drive agency actions. **HPs in evaluation should be used to understand the different roles and actions that agencies take on in a particular context, as a means of identifying added advantage and complementarity between agencies**. Sustainable development and development agencies should also be considered when reflecting on HPs in evaluations (e.g. in protracted settings).

**The humanitarian-development-nexus and the role of UN integrated missions (UNDAF/HRPs) deserve more attention in the guide**. The guide should focus on the trade-off between neutrality, independence and impartiality vis-à-vis alignment to governments, and the focus on stakeholder inclusion in operational approaches by UN agencies under the grand bargain and new way of working. The guide should reflect on access issues and how trade-off occurs between principles as a result of access. The humanitarian-development nexus increasingly blurs the line between development and humanitarian work,

this should be conceptualized further in evaluations, and practitioners should understand that this trade-off is expected in some contexts. **Evaluations that look at HPs should unpack trade-offs at different levels: how HPs are applied at the organizational vis-a-vis the policy/operational level.** Where top-level interpretations are aligned to policy, but in practice field staff are limited by logistical and political constraints. Agencies often compete in humanitarian settings for funds which may influence the application of principles as well. The guide should offer evaluation practitioners the insight to reflect on how agencies prioritize between trade-off in principles by analysing externalities (operational context, political context, and funding). This is closely linked to the issue of coordination and negotiation between agencies and how they operate through HCTs and UNDAF frameworks. Evaluations that focus on partnerships, coordination, synergy, and complementary are therefore well placed to use HPs as an evaluative lens to understand these mechanisms better. Humanitarian negotiation is an interesting area that was mentioned by multiple interviewees. How do agencies formulate a common position, find synergy, engage in partnerships, and diversify their work in an emergency setting? What drives this process, when do negotiations stop and competition begins, and what does this say about their adherence to HPs?

## Content, Structure, and Methodology

A general suggestion for the revision of the guide is to focus on the one hand on higher level questions that look at organizational strategy and decision-making in a particular context. **Evaluating humanitarian principles should not be the end goal, but rather a means to better understand issues around accountability, organizational positioning, coordination, competition, and synergy.** On the other hand, the guide should offer tools that allow practitioners to integrate these strategic questions that reflect on HPs in more common types of evaluations. Rather than reflecting on the definition of HPs, the guide should, on the one hand, provide practitioners with methodological tools to understand context and accountability to affected populations: a) how to assess results, b) how to assess political sensitivity, c) how to ensure quality assurance. The guide should offer a means to link OECD/DAC evaluation criteria to HPs. These methods should allow practitioners to distinguish between policy and operation application of HPs. **The guide should separate substance from methodology, and should offer modules that practitioners can draw from** e.g. a section on training material for evaluating how HPs are applied in their context: how to conduct a political economy analysis, stakeholder mapping, and a critical framework to assess agency roles in particular contexts. Although the guide offers some guidance on skills needed to conduct these complex evaluations, it could go further by offering practitioners methods in the following areas:

- a) How to integrate HPs in classical evaluations (focusing on development of ToRs, KEQs and creating buy-in and ownership)
- b) How to plan for evaluations in emergency and post-conflict settings (focusing on political sensitivities and access constraints)
- c) How to conduct evaluations in emergency and post-conflict settings
- d) Required skills and expertise

The overall design of the guide should be more user-friendly and mainstreamed to UNEG as a whole. Currently the guide is dominated by large amounts of text and solely focused on humanitarian action. A lot of the information could be condensed and packaged into visual graphics to help readers understand possible linkages between HPs and OECD/DAC criteria, as well as trade-offs between principles as a result of contextual factors. Furthermore, clear information on the intended utility should be emphasized. Start

with intended users/audience, and clearly mention the objectives of the guide. These practical suggestions for the structure of the guide are summarized again below:

- a) Separate substance from methodology
- b) Clear focus on intended users, objectives, and utility
- c) Guidance for formulation of ToRs, KEQs and integration of HPs in standard evaluations
- d) Guidance on tools for conducting in-depth context and political economy analysis
- e) Tools for planning and implementing evaluations on HPs in complex settings

## Next Steps

Lastly, some interviewees mentioned that it would be important to commission at least one or more of the original authors to conduct the revision of the guide, in order to ensure all the foregone discussions and consultations are not completely lost. Another suggestion is to commission a designer or content developer, possibly through the ALNAP network to assist with revisions to the layout of the guide.

The table below provides a timeline for the anticipated work on revising the guide and its completion in 2020.

Activity	Timeline	Responsible party
Integrate feedback from UNEG AGM	June 2019	Task team
Develop ToR and Source for consultants	July-August 2019	Task team
Consultations and final content map	September-October 2019	Consultants
1 <sup>st</sup> Revised draft	December 2019	Consultants
Feedback on revised draft	January 2020	Task team and HEIG members
Final draft guide	February 2020	Consultants

## Annex: Interviewing guide

### UNEG – Humanitarian Evaluation Interest Group Reflections on Humanitarian Principles in Evaluations

#### Background:

- *The HEIG was established as a sub-group of the [UN Evaluation Group](#) in 2015 in response to the perceived gap within UNEG in reflecting humanitarian-specific considerations in UNEG normative and guidance development work.*
- *One area where the HEIG aims to fill this gap is by strengthen the way Humanitarian Principles are reflected in evaluation practice. In 2016 the HEIG published a [working paper](#) titled 'Reflecting Humanitarian Principles in Evaluation'. The group is now gathering feedback from practitioners and evaluation specialists, with the aim of further informing the development of a UNEG pilot guide for reflecting HPs in evaluation (2020).*

#### Purpose of the interview:

- *The interview seeks to gather first-hand experience from experienced humanitarian evaluation team leaders on how they have considered and sought to reflect Humanitarian Principles (more or less explicitly) in their work. We welcome any reflections on challenges and experiences. In turn, this will help us understand which type of guidance or evaluation management support may be needed to strengthen this challenging area of evaluation practice. All the final products from this initiative will be made public and your contribution duly acknowledged.*

#### Humanitarian Principles and their definition:

*For reference purposes the four humanitarian principles are defined as:*

1. **Humanity:** *Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.*
2. **Neutrality:** *Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature.*
3. **Impartiality:** *Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.*
4. **Independence:** *Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.*

## Interviewee details

Interviewee Name	Organization	Title	Title and date of relevant evaluations

## Guiding questions:

### Evaluating IHPs in General

1. In which areas of your work have you come across evaluating humanitarian principles, and/or evaluation that have taken into consideration IHPs?

*Key areas for probing:*

- a. Type of evaluation and commissioning organization?
  - b. In which country and/or context (e.g. natural disaster, conflict...etc)?
2. What were the main challenges/shortcomings you encountered, and what were the consequences of these challenges/shortcomings?

*Key areas for probing:*

- a. Were there any challenges related to evaluation design, planning, data availability, context analysis, methodology, and/or analysis (e.g. inclusion of theory of change, identifying risks early on, confidentiality arrangements, use of benchmarks and indicators)?
  - b. Did you face any issues with regards to Implementation (political sensitives, security concerns)?
  - c. Did you experience any issues in regards to stakeholder buy-in, and/or reluctance on behalf of the organisation(s) being evaluated?
  - d. Did you experience any issues during the data collection such as during KIIs and FGDs, or reluctance by interviewees?
3. How were these challenges managed, and what were your key lessons moving forward?

*Key areas for probing:*

- a. Which actors were involved?
- b. What would you have done differently, what should others have done differently?
- c. In addition to challenges, can you share any good practices from these evaluations, and which factors made it successful?

4. If relevant to you, are there any noticeable differences in evaluation approaches to IHPs among different entities/organizations, and how IHPs have been taken into account in evaluations by these entities (e.g. implicitly or explicitly). NGOs  
*Key areas for probing (can also be framed as challenges in question 2)*
  - a. What factors could explain these differences?
    - i. Were these related to organizational culture, if yes, how?
    - ii. Were these related to leadership and decision-making, if yes, how?
    - iii. Were there differences in the way policies were applied in practice, what type of differences?
    - iv. Were the differences in the way HPs were understood, what type of differences?
    - v. Were there differences in the way HPs were monitored (if at all), what type of differences?
    - vi. Were there differences in the way accountability and consultations with stakeholders was exercised?
5. What tools would you suggest to utilise when attempting to evaluate humanitarian principles in programme design and implementation? Or, how you think what kind of tools will be useful to evaluate IHPs (or not).

### Specific Questions on the use of the guidance

1. How relevant do you feel the guidance note is for your work in evaluations?
2. How useful do you feel the guidance would be as a tool for implementing evaluations?
  - a. What are its strengths / weaknesses?
  - b. What are the major shortcomings?
3. What recommendations would you have for UNEG to further strengthen the guide as a practical tool for evaluators?

## Annex: Interview Dataset and Suggested Content Revisions



HP interview  
analysis\_content revisi<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Inserted as object, double click object to open database.