Statement by Andrea E. Cook
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on

Item 7

Evaluation of the UNFPA Support to Family Planning, 2008 – 2013
Main results

6 September 2016
Mr. President,
Members of the Executive Board,

It is my pleasure to present to you the main results of the independent thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to family planning during the period 2008-2013. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess how the framework of the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2008-2013) guided the programming and implementation of UNFPA family planning interventions, and to facilitate learning and capture good practices to inform the current UNFPA family planning strategy (2012-2020), as well as other related programmes such as UNFPA Supplies.

The evaluation was conducted by the independent Evaluation Office of UNFPA in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team of independent evaluators and thematic experts during 2014 and 2015. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation are therefore highly relevant for the current strategic plan period.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates, let me present the key conclusions of the evaluation

The evaluation shows that UNFPA has been an effective agent in global efforts to raise the profile of family planning as a development priority. Together with national and international partners, UNFPA has contributed to the global consensus, which has returned family planning to its rightful place among the priorities of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, underpinning the importance of family planning as an important means to safeguard the human rights and health of future generations.

The evaluation team found that UNFPA has consistently supported national ownership and government leadership in family planning at country levels. In doing so, UNFPA has relied on its comparative advantage of close relationships with national governments, and on its networks which encompass a wide range of stakeholders, to effectively leverage its country presence.

During the period under evaluation, UNFPA was found to have had mixed success in promoting and supporting the integration of family planning. UNFPA has provided effective leadership in integration of family planning services with HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment, as well as in humanitarian response. However, there has been more limited progress in integrating family planning into other aspects of sexual and reproductive health at the level of service delivery.
The evaluation team found that UNFPA has effectively engaged in efforts to improve the long-term prospects for family planning action in terms of national policy, contributing to financial, institutional and cultural sustainability. At country level, UNFPA has contributed to improved financial sustainability of family planning by effectively advocating for stronger government commitments to resource allocation. However, there continue to be challenges in efforts to sustainably strengthen health systems to deliver quality family planning services.

The evaluation found that UNFPA has been a lead advocate for a human rights-based approach to family planning, in particular for the rights and needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups. There has been significant progress at the global level, however this has not always filtered down to country level. In some countries more effort is required to address important social and cultural barriers to services for vulnerable and marginalised groups. The evaluation team consider that the understanding of what constitutes a human rights-based approach for family planning is variable across national contexts, and in some cases, it was difficult to determine how human rights principles had actually been operationalised in family planning programmes in practice.

Finally, the evaluation found that UNFPA lacks a body of systematically organised evidence on important aspects of family planning, especially at national level. In particular, UNFPA lacks evidence: (i) on the extent of integration of family planning into other aspects of sexual and reproductive health; (ii) on the effect of different approaches and interventions on quality of services, equity and access; and (iii) on available evidence on good practices in family planning programming. This represents a gap in organisational learning and impedes the improvement of programme design, based on an understanding of “what works” and “what does not work.” It is important to note that the evaluation team acknowledge the important role played by UNFPA in bringing a practical field-based perspective in relation to reviews of evidence on potential high impact practices generated by other development partners.

**Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,**

I will now turn to the main recommendations of the evaluation.

**First,** UNFPA should optimise its strong comparative advantages of its close technical and strategic relationship with governments and its central role in coordination and programming links to a wide array of stakeholders to address important challenges in the advancement of family planning. These
challenges include, in particular: (i) holding governments accountable for maintaining or increasing financial and other commitments to family planning; (ii) advocating for a human rights-based approach, including addressing the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups; (iii) engaging with a diverse range of partners to improve and scale up services.

Second, in the framework of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and given the current trend to channel family planning interventions through predominantly supply-side initiatives (FP2020, UNFPA Supplies), it is essential to ensure that UNFPA places family planning firmly within a sexual and reproductive health and human rights context. Family planning is instrumental to the achievement of the UNFPA mandate and UNFPA needs to be able to communicate effectively to all staff and partners that a focus on family planning requires strengthened integration and collaboration between technical and programmatic areas.

Third, UNFPA should continue to take a strong stance in the promotion of a human rights-based approach at global, regional and country levels. In particular, UNFPA should ensure that its current operational guidelines for implementing a human rights-based approach in family planning and reaching the most marginalised and vulnerable populations are backed up by a shared operational understanding of concrete actions for implementation by country office staff and partners. UNFPA should continue and enhance efforts to ensure that its programmes prioritise quality of care, non-discrimination and voluntary choice of family planning and family planning methods.

Fourth, at country level, UNFPA should work to focus on modes of engagement in family planning where it has a strong comparative advantage and where it has adequate resources to follow through. In practice, this will require a greater focus on the policy advocacy mode of engagement which, in turn, and as already noted, requires improvements in systems and expertise for knowledge management to inform and strengthen UNFPA critical roles in policy, advocacy and evidence brokering.

Fifth, UNFPA should strengthen the capacity of country offices to document and report on results of their interventions support to family planning. To this end, UNFPA should intensify efforts to implement and roll-out an effective results-oriented monitoring system measuring results beyond activities and outputs. UNFPA should also enhance its role in producing, synthesizing, translating and disseminating evidence at national, regional and global levels.
Finally, the evaluation recommends that, in-house, UNFPA should clarify the roles and responsibilities of the different branches in the Technical Division, as well as other divisions and offices (especially regional offices) tasked with technical and programme oversight of family planning. UNFPA should review how country offices are supported to implement effective, technically sound, human rights-based and results-oriented family planning programme activities. Roles, responsibilities, procedures and accountabilities for support to family planning should be revised accordingly.

I request UNFPA Management to provide an update to the Executive Board on progress against these recommendations in the context of the next year’s annual report by the Executive Director to the Executive Board.

The full evaluation report is available on the public webpage of the Evaluation Office. It is complemented by a user friendly brief and five country case study notes: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe.

I thank the Executive Board for the continued support and guidance.

This concludes my presentation, Mr. President.

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