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EVALUATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS: UNHCR'S PLAN AND ACTIVITIES¹

1. Following the formal adoption of UNHCR's evaluation policy in early 2003, the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) has continued to promote the development and devolution of the evaluation function in UNHCR, encouraging other units at headquarters and in the field to initiate, undertake and manage evaluation activities. This report is divided into two parts; the first one briefly describes new developments in the evaluation function while the second part offers an update of ongoing evaluation projects, clustered by thematic priorities.

I. NEW TRENDS IN THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

Joint evaluations

2. Together with other agencies in the United Nations system, UNHCR had previously undertaken joint evaluations in operations of mutual concern. Some of those evaluations were found to be rather too complex to manage and, as a result, less attention was paid to developing this tool of effective inter-agency collaboration further. However, joint evaluations have met with increasing interest of late and several new projects were launched recently.

3. Together with the Evaluation Service of the World Food Programme (WFP), EPAU recently commenced a joint evaluation of the five pilot countries in which WFP has taken responsibility for food distribution to refugee beneficiaries. A team of two consultants is scheduled to visit all five pilot countries and will ultimately produce an assessment of the effectiveness of this arrangement, not only in terms of cost efficiency but also with respect to protection concerns related to food distribution. This evaluation is jointly managed by UNHCR and WFP, and its findings will ultimately inform the decision by the two agencies whether or not to replicate this arrangement on a global level.

¹ This document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline due to resource constraints.

4. EPAU and UNHCR's Technical Support Section (TSS), in coordination with the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health for Refugees (IAWG), are playing a leading role in the Inter-Agency Global Evaluation of Reproductive Health Services for Refugees and IDPs. The final evaluation report will be launched on the occasion of UNHCR's Pre-Excom consultations with non-governmental organizations in September 2004.

5. In late 2002, a group of non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and academic institutions launched an Inter-Agency Health Evaluation Initiative, in recognition of the need to evaluate the collective effort of the health and nutrition sector in refugee and conflict-affected situations. As part of this initiative, three pilot evaluations were carried out amongst refugee populations in Nepal, Pakistan and Zambia in late 2003. Based on the experience and lessons learned from these three pilots, TSS, in close collaboration with EPAU and an inter-agency evaluation steering committee, is working on the development of health evaluation guidance notes.

6. As a follow-up to the European Commission Humanitarian Office's (ECHO) 2001 evaluation of UNHCR's activities, EPAU is cooperating with ECHO to develop an outline and methodology for ECHO's 2004 evaluation. ECHO seeks to assess the effectiveness of its thematic funding and is considering undertaking several country visits to analyse the impact of its financial support to UNHCR. An evaluation team is expected to begin its research in autumn 2004.

Continued focus on the utilization of evaluation findings

7. The findings from the three large thematic evaluations concluded in 2002 on Refugee Children, Refugee Women, and the Community Services function have prompted UNHCR to dedicate staff and resources to ensure that recommendations contained in these reports are followed up consistently. Many recommendations have indeed informed changes to operational policies and respective implementation procedures. EPAU places an increasingly high value on maintaining a strong utilization focus from the very inception of an evaluation project. EPAU is prepared to take a more active stand to ensure that evaluation findings are discussed widely within the organization and that respective "lessons learned" are fully absorbed.

8. Following earlier recommendations², EPAU started in April 2004 to build up an electronic follow-up mechanism for evaluation recommendations similar to that used by other organizations, such as UNICEF and WFP. A database is currently being set up to compile and catalogue recommendations from around 100 EPAU reports since 1994. Recommendations contained in those reports will be measured against policy changes in the respective functional areas in order to obtain a clearer picture of the impact achieved through evaluations.

II. EVALUATION PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

9. During the period under review, UNHCR's evaluation function has focused on a number of global operational and policy issues which are of particular concern to the organization and its partners. The following paragraphs identify those issues and provide a brief description of the

² See EPAU Report of Sept. 20, 2000 "Improving the Effectiveness of UNHCR's Evaluation Function".

evaluation projects and activities that have been undertaken or initiated with respect to each of those themes. The planned evaluation projects identified in this section are subject to further review. Further details of UNHCR's evaluation and policy analysis work programme can be found on the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website.

Internally displaced persons

10. The international community's role and responsibilities in meeting the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has evolved significantly over the past decades, prompting EPAU to launch a review of UNHCR's involvement with IDPs in recent years. An examination of the variables that have influenced or determined UNHCR's involvement in the past will assist in establishing a realistic understanding of the potential for UNHCR to be consistently and predictably involved. The review will also focus on the question of who takes decisions about the possible engagement with IDPs and the extent to which existing policy criteria are used in operational decision making. The timing of decisions about involvement with IDPs and the nature and extent of that involvement will be subjected to a detailed analysis, together with the level of UNHCR's engagement in inter-agency discussions throughout the process.

Real-time evaluations of emergency operations

11. EPAU continues to pursue the concept of Real-Time Evaluations (RTE) as a rapid learning tool for rapidly evolving refugee operations. Unlike traditional evaluations, an RTE allows for immediate feedback into operational management.

12. Following the return of United Nations staff to Monrovia in September 2003, EPAU fielded an RTE team to evaluate the immediate operational issues with which UNHCR was confronted in Liberia. Against the backdrop of an operation severely affected by the security environment outside the capital, ongoing assistance to IDPs was a major focus for the international community. The evaluation highlighted the complexity of inter-agency coordination, particularly in the area of protection. The RTE also ascertained the progress achieved by UNHCR's Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) teams in this emergency.

13. In June 2004, a further Real-Time Evaluation was undertaken to review UNHCR's operational effectiveness in responding to the Chad emergency. This RTE found that UNHCR's overall response was rather uneven; while the operation accomplished the relocation of large numbers of refugees from the border areas in the face of major logistical obstacles, it encountered serious difficulties in stabilizing the refugee population in the newly-created camp sites. In gauging UNHCR's overall effectiveness, the evaluation also analysed the reasons why UNHCR's performance may not have been in line with expectations and put forth a number of specific recommendations.

14. In the broader context of studying UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity, three external consultants managed by EPAU undertook an evaluation of UNHCR's contribution to Emergency Preparedness and Contingency Planning in the Asia and Pacific region, from March to June 2004. This evaluation of the E-centre in Japan examined UNHCR's contribution to capacity building and training in the field of emergency management. The report

reflects the achievements made, identifies the “lessons learned”, and presents recommendations to assist UNHCR in making decisions about the future direction of the programme in the Asia and Pacific region and its possible replication in other parts of the world.

Refugee livelihoods

15. As a follow-up to the Protracted Refugee Situation (PRS) study, EPAU has taken on the “Livelihood Project” which will be looking into livelihood options amongst refugees, returnees and members of host communities. Based on a recognition that insufficient baseline data was available on the concept of refugee livelihoods, this project was conceived to provide an evidence-based analysis which in turn could inform the design and implementation of livelihood interventions.

16. In the light of the High Commissioner’s “Framework for durable solutions for refugees and persons of concern”, the Livelihood Project emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and livelihoods for refugees, both to improve the quality of their life during their period of asylum and to prepare them better for their eventual reintegration. The project comprises a literature review and several case studies, of which the following five have been finalized: Congolese refugees in Gabon; Sierra Leonean and Casamance refugees in the Gambia; Mozambican refugees in South Africa; Somali refugees in Egypt and Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia.

17. As part of the Livelihood Project, EPAU has initiated the refugee livelihoods network, an interactive electronic network comprising UNHCR staff, consultants and researchers with a common interest in refugee livelihoods and self-reliance issues. The purpose of the network is to exchange ideas and lessons learned, to keep members abreast of current initiatives and to provide an opportunity for learning and inter-agency cooperation.

Reintegration

18. The return of refugees to their country of origin and UNHCR’s focus on sustaining their reintegration continues to be closely examined in the pursuit of durable solutions. The evaluation of UNHCR’s repatriation and reintegration programme in East Timor offers a number of key lessons learned. Similarly, EPAU has recently commissioned an evaluation of the reintegration programme in Sierra Leone which is expected to provide practical guidance for the design of reintegration programmes in the region.

Canadian RCMP Secondment in Guinea

19. In mid-2003 EPAU undertook a mid-term evaluation of a pilot project sponsored and facilitated by the Canadian Government. Initially, two experienced Royal Canadian Mounted Policemen were seconded to UNHCR’s field operations in Guinea in a capacity-building effort to support and train national security details and coordinate refugee security activities nationwide. This project was seen as a proactive attempt at making operational the “Ladder of Options”, a concept introduced some years ago to establish a standby capacity of law enforcement and public security experts. As a result of the mid-term evaluation, the secondment was extended for a second year. In 2004 EPAU will continue the process and undertake a final evaluation, looking

into the interaction between the different entities involved, and will outline useful recommendations that could be appropriate for other future security “packages”.

UNHCR’s vehicle fleet around the world

20. A recent analysis revealed that UNHCR currently has approximately 9000 vehicles of different specifications on its active inventory, with a purchase value of some \$220 million. The 2003 evaluation of the community services function in UNHCR raised the question to what extent these vehicles directly benefit refugees. A joint EPAU/Supply Management Service (SMS) team has begun analysing this issue and will travel to the Balkans, Africa and Asia to evaluate how well UNHCR selects, maintains and manages this large investment.

Building capacity through training

21. In order to promote the development of the evaluation function in UNHCR further, EPAU organized a two-day Evaluation Training Workshop in March 2004. The purpose of the workshop was to provide the participants with an introduction to the purposes and methods of evaluation. EPAU is planning an autumn session of the workshop. As was the case for the spring session, a number of NGO participants will be invited in addition to UNHCR staff.

Other themes

22. EPAU maintains a strong focus on protection in the selection of evaluation topics. The evaluation of regional resettlement activities in western Africa has offered a sound analysis to ascertain the validity of some of the underlying assumptions which prompted this regional resettlement scheme. Another important evaluation in the field of protection, “Enhancing UNHCR’s capacity to monitor the protection, rights and well-being of refugees”, is based on an extensive review of the multiple roles UNHCR assumes in both protection and programme monitoring and constitutes the first time that this function has been systematically analysed across the organizational structure.

23. In addition to the projects identified above, EPAU is routinely called upon to provide other services to sections within UNHCR, including facilitation of planning meetings or conceptual groundwork for projects undertaken by other entities. Activities that fall into this category also include the development of a sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) monitoring tool or a compilation of research methods in the humanitarian context.

24. EPAU acts as a Secretariat to the re-established Operational Policy Committee and is increasingly engaged in the review of global policies such as the updating of UNHCR’s policy on urban refugees.