MANAGEMENT FOLLOW-UP TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INDEPENDENT PROJECT EVALUATION

This guidance note is intended to clarify procedures for the management response to recommendations of independent project evaluations. Criteria for quality of recommendations and management response are set forth with relevant workflows.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of recommendation follow-up is to strengthen the use of evaluation findings, promote organizational learning and accountability for evaluation results, and thereby contribute to improved programme and project design and delivery. Active and routine follow-up of recommendations from independent evaluations is initiated by EVAL and carried out by management. EVAL collects management response data and reports to the Governing Body each November on project recommendation follow-up in its Annual Evaluation Report. Workflow charts are provided depicting the process and responsibilities of officials concerned.

ROLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN EVALUATION

The value of evaluation is contingent on its use and recommendations play a critical role in contributing to the usefulness of an evaluation report. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)
which sets the norms and standards for evaluation for all United Nations agencies summarises the inter-linking components of evaluation and the up-stream factors which foster useful evaluations:

- Relevance of the evaluation, in terms of timing, so as to make evaluation findings available when decisions are taken;
- Quality/credibility of the evaluation, which derives from independence, impartiality, and a properly defined and inclusive methodology;
- Acceptance of the evaluation recommendations, which partially depends on the above two points;
- Appropriateness of practices in the management response, dissemination and use of evaluation findings.

**QUALITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are several points in the evaluation process where the quality of recommendations can be checked and improved.

- When the Terms of Reference are drafted, specific criteria for recommendations and report formatting are written into the contract;
- When the consultant presents the draft report to staff, constituents and other stakeholders, the evaluation manager and all stakeholders can provide critical input to the evaluator to ensure that the relevance and quality of the recommendations adhere to the contract specifications and follow UNEG and ILO standards; and
- When the evaluation manager submits the draft report to the regional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer (or the Senior Evaluation Officer in EVAL for centralized evaluations). This is the final critical juncture where the relevance and quality of recommendations can be assessed and changes requested before the report is finalized.

Timely and effective management follow-up to evaluation recommendations has many benefits to the organization. It deepens the participation, and thereby the understanding of the whole evaluation process; encourages improvements in project implementation; raises awareness of what works well and what doesn’t -- all of which contribute to a sustained process of organizational learning.

The quality of follow-up is contingent upon well-crafted, specific and actionable recommendations, and accordingly EVAL has defined specific criteria aimed at evaluation managers and external

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consultants to ensure that the quality of recommendations meets professional standards. These criteria were developed based on discussions with the Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC) and conform to UNEG norms and standards.2

**Box 1 Criteria on recommendation and response quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Quality criteria</th>
<th>Management Response Quality criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To ensure quality in reports, recommendations should have:</td>
<td>To ensure effective response and follow-up, recommendation responses should have:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compliance</strong>: Be numbered and not more than 12.</td>
<td><strong>Compliance</strong>: Indicate compliance for each numbered recommendation. If there is no compliance, explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Completion</strong>: All recommendations for which the line managers take responsibility must be completed, and if not, adequate explanation given in the comments field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong>: Be clear and concise, and linked to the project and/or country. Relevance requires that recommendations:</td>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong>: Be clear and concise, and linked to the project and/or country. Relevance requires that the management response must:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- be specific</td>
<td>- contain language that is clear and concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- follow logically from findings</td>
<td>- be relevant to the recommendation and linked to the requested action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- specify who is called upon to act</td>
<td>- indicate who has taken action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- specify time frame for follow-up</td>
<td>- clearly indicate time-lines for ongoing follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- acknowledge resource implications</td>
<td>- indicate any resource implications</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coherence</strong>: Be firmly based on evidence and analysis; be relevant, realistic and actionable, with priorities for action made clear. Recommendations should not contradict one another.</td>
<td><strong>Coherence</strong>: Respond to the action and priorities recommended, and be coherent in their totality, expressing priorities. Management responses should be coherent as a group response and not contradictory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The following workflow charts present the steps of the evaluation process relevant to approval and follow-up. Once EVAL has received and approved the finalized report from the Regional M&E Officer or the HQ Sector evaluation focal point, the recommendations – taken verbatim from the report – are entered into a data subset in the EVAL i-Track database.

**Figure 1. Workflow for Quality Recommendations in Reports**
A management response template is then generated by EVAL and sent to the line manager responsible for the project. Copies are sent to the regional M&E officers, the Technical Unit backstopping the project, and the concerned Senior Evaluation Officer at Headquarters. This is done within one week of receipt of the approved report.

Figure 2. Workflow for Management Response to Recommendations and Reporting to the Governing Body

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This official is cited in the project Approval Minute and is usually a Country Director, Regional Director or Department Director.
QUALITY AND WORKFLOW OF MANAGEMENT FOLLOW-UP

As seen in Figure 2, EVAL is responsible for creating a follow-up template from the evaluation recommendations. This Excel template is then sent to the Line Manager responsible for reporting on the project, within one month of approving the evaluation report. *Evaluation specialists or evaluation focal points are not responsible for planning or reporting on follow-up.* It is a conflict of interest for evaluation officers to monitor the adequacy of follow-up in addition to reporting on follow-up.

Line Management works with relevant staff and is responsible for ensuring that meaningful follow-up takes place and is recorded in the Excel template. This initial action plan and other relevant information should be filled in on the Excel template and returned to EVAL with two months. Much of the management response would have already been decided at the evaluation workshop; the job for the line manager now is to ensure that the action plan is implemented and reports on its progress are sent to EVAL.

Each recommendation in the template must be responded to individually, acknowledging if it is accepted or rejected. If rejected, management must explain why in the COMMENTS column of the template. If accepted, management must provide an action plan with a time frame, and any possible citation for resource implications.

After a period of six months has passed, EVAL will send reminders out to retrieve the finalized responses.

FILLING IN THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TEMPLATE FOR THE ACTION PLAN – ROUND ONE

Only the line manager, or staff appointed by the line manager, need take action at this point which involves filling in the template columns describing the action plan for responding to the recommendations. The action plan should be sent back to EVAL within one month, then updating the template as progress is achieved addressing the recommendations. Instructions for filling it in are as follows:

- **Management Response** column indicates whether action taken on the recommendation is *completed, partially completed, outstanding, or no action planned* (a pull-down menu). In the case where no action is planned, please provide explanatory remarks in the *Comments* field. This is updated when a second round of reporting takes place. *NOTE: A response can be considered “Completed” when all action required of the line manager has been adequately taken and does not mean that all action started has taken place.*

- **Action to be Taken** is a free text column briefly summarizing “action/action to be taken” with clear responsibilities, as well as a timetable.

- **Addressed To** column indicates to whom the recommendation action is addressed. It has a pull-down menu. Again, any detail can be put into the Comments field.
• **Comments** column should contain any pertinent details, especially when *no action taken* is a response to *Management Response*, or there is *some additional information required for the Addressed To* column.

• **Resource Implications** column should briefly express any financial implications foreseen.

• **Date of Line Manager’s Input** should reflect the date the template is submitted or updated.

**Figure 3. Sample of the Management Response Reporting Template**

**Figure 4. Timeline and Responsibilities for Management Response and Action Plan**

- ✓ Evaluation report is forwarded to EVAL for approval by regional or sectoral evaluation focal point. Recommendations must adhere to policy guidelines and the focal point should cite any management responses that are addressed to constituents in the approval submission form.

- ✓ Once report is approved, EVAL creates the management response template in Excel and sends it back to the responsible line manager for action with copies to the Technical Backstopping Unit, the EVAL HQ Desk Officer responsible for approval of the evaluation and the Evaluation Focal Point. The line manager is the official cited as responsible for the project in the PARDEV project approval minute.

- ✓ Line manager coordinates action plan with relevant project staff and ensures that all necessary details of action taken or to be taken are entered into the template. The action plan is returned to EVAL within one month.

- ✓ Line Manager ensures that relevant staff takes the necessary action to respond to the action plan.
The Evaluation Unit expects a timely response to the action plan. When the action plan is carried out, the line manager is expected to report back to EVAL with the results. After six months a reminder letter is sent back to the line manager requesting that follow-up be completed. If a second reminder letter is necessary, then the relevant Executive Directors (EDs) or Regional Directors (RDs) are copied. Management response to project evaluation recommendations is obligatory and is an essential part of the Annual Evaluation Report covering evaluation performance in the ILO.

**Second response and updates:** Line management should consider the following points in finalizing follow-up to evaluation recommendations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Columns in the Template</th>
<th>Instructions on filling in the information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management Response (Pull down menu)</td>
<td>The second response should indicate whether the action foreseen in the first response was completed, partially completed or rejected. If rejected, please give details in the Comments column. <strong>NOTE:</strong> Action is considered completed if line management has pursued the changes recommended and put the process into action. It does not mean that everything requested has been actualized or achieved; when this is the case, details can be given in the COMMENTS column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action to be Taken (Free text)</td>
<td>This should include a very brief summary of what was undertaken to achieve follow-up, action initiated by management, including explanations to supplement the first column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressed to (Pull down menu)</td>
<td>This usually stays the same as in the initial Excel file, but may change. EVAL reports separately on recommendations that are aimed at our constituents and these need to be signaled clearly, with additional information provided in the Comments column if necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments (Free text)</td>
<td>This column is meant to provide additional information for Management Response and Addressed to columns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Implications</td>
<td>Usually exclusively filled in during the second stage of follow-up once action has taken place, and should be a brief statement explaining any financial implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of the present update</td>
<td>Should reflect the date that line management sent the update.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The management response is approved by the relevant regional or sectoral Desk Officer in the Evaluation Unit and the results are compiled for reporting to the Governing Body each November.

**Figure 5. Timeline for Finalizing Management Response**

1. Updates are recorded in the Excel template and sent periodically to EVAL where they are recorded until no further action by line management is anticipated.

2. Each June, analysis is conducted by the Evaluation Unit on all collected management response templates. The compilation of management response performance is then reported in the Annual Evaluation Report, by Region and Sector, in the November session of the Governing Body. This includes follow-up on recommendations aimed at constituents.

3. While the main responsibility for monitoring follow-up to recommendations lies with the line manager, EVAL will take an active role in issuing reminders to responsible line managers in cases of persistent non-compliance.