



Stockholm Evaluation Unit – Guidelines

# ETHICAL GUIDELINES

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## INTRODUCTION

### BASIS

The *SEU Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations* are based on commonly held and internationally recognized professional ideals. The Guidelines have been drawn up with reference to relevant texts (see Annex 1) among them the UN Norms and Standards for Evaluation and the MSF Ethics Framework. More specifically, the current guideline is an adapted version of the 2008 United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations, from which MSF has been granted authorization to use and adapt the Guidelines. Only minimal changes were done to use specific MSF terminology and frame of reference.

All staff members of MSF are subject to the MSF's Behavioural Commitments. These Guidelines are consistent with the standards of conduct defined by this document.

### PURPOSE

Aspiring to ethical conduct in evaluation is important for several reasons:

- a. *Responsible use of power* – the power to commission an evaluation implies a responsibility towards all those involved in the evaluation for the proper conduct of the evaluation.
- b. *Ensuring credibility* – with a fair, impartial, and complete assessment, stakeholders are more likely to have faith in the results of an evaluation and so take note of the recommendations arising.
- c. *Responsible use of resources* – ethical conduct in evaluation increases the chances of acceptance by the parties to the evaluation and therefore the likelihood that the investment in the evaluation will result in improved outcomes.

### APPLICATION

These Guidelines apply to the conduct of evaluation by the MSF Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU) by staff members, external consultants, or evaluators from external partners. Some evaluations may require additional obligations related to the context, specific evaluation tools, or the nature of the project being evaluated.<sup>1</sup>

## ETHICAL CONDUCT IN EVALUATION – A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, criteria for revision by Ethical Review Board mentioned in the "MSF Research Ethics Framework".

All those engaged in designing, conducting, and managing evaluation activities should aspire to conduct high quality work guided by professional standards and ethical and moral principles. The integrity of evaluation is especially dependent on the ethical conduct of key actors in the evaluation process, including:

- a. **Evaluators** - conducting evaluation, whether MSF staff members, external consultants, or evaluators from external partners.
- b. **Evaluation Manager/Officer** - charged with the management of evaluation exercises.
- c. **Head of SEU** - the individual who is the head of the Stockholm Evaluation Unit and charged with the management of the evaluation function within MSF-OCB.
- d. **Stockholm Evaluation Unit**- the office or unit within MSF-OCB carrying the primary responsibility for the evaluation function.
- e. **Evaluation Commissioner** – the party requesting and/ or overseeing the evaluation.

## ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN EVALUATION

### INTENTIONALITY OF EVALUATION

#### Utility

Evaluations should be designed to help organisations address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of participants (see also 3.3 Participants). Evaluations are valuable to the extent to which they serve the information and decision-making needs of intended users, including answering the questions posed of the evaluation by its commissioners.

#### Necessity

Evaluation involves the expenditure of time and financial resources and, even where mitigated, can lead to disruption, invasion of privacy and exposure to risks. Therefore, evaluations shall only be commissioned where they are necessary, and the effort justified in terms of the benefits likely to accrue from the evaluation exercise.

### OBLIGATIONS OF EVALUATORS

#### Independence

Evaluation in the MSF should be demonstrably free of bias. To this end, evaluators are recruited for their ability to exercise independent judgement. Evaluators shall ensure that they are not unduly influenced by the views or statements of any party. Where the evaluator or the Evaluation Manager/Officer comes under pressure to adopt a particular position or to introduce bias into the evaluation findings, it is the responsibility of the evaluator to ensure that independence of judgement

is maintained. Where such pressures may endanger the completion or integrity of the evaluation, the issue will be referred to the Evaluation Manager, and where necessary, the Head of SEU, who will discuss the concerns of the relevant parties and decide on an approach which will ensure that evaluation findings and recommendations are consistent, verified and independently presented (see below Conflict of Interest).

## Impartiality

Evaluations must give a comprehensive and balanced presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the policy, program, project, or organisational unit being evaluated, taking due account of the views of a diverse cross-section of stakeholders. Evaluators shall:

- a. Operate in an impartial and unbiased manner at all stages of the evaluation.
- b. Collect diverse perspectives on the subject under evaluation.
- c. Guard against distortion in their reporting caused by their personal views and feelings.

## Credibility

Evaluation shall be credible and based on reliable data and observations. Evaluation reports shall show evidence of consistency and dependability in data, findings, judgements, and lessons learned; appropriately reflecting the quality of the methodology, procedures and analysis used to collect and interpret data. Evaluation Managers/Officers and evaluators shall endeavour to ensure that each evaluation is accurate, relevant, and timely and provides a clear, concise, and balanced presentation of the evidence, findings, issues, conclusions, and recommendations.

## Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest shall be avoided as far as possible so that the credibility of the evaluation process and product shall not be undermined. Conflicts of interest may arise at the level of the Evaluation Unit, or at that of individual staff members or consultants. Conflicts of interest should be disclosed and dealt with openly and honestly.

Evaluators are required to disclose in writing any past experiences, of themselves, their immediate family, close friends, or associates, which may give rise to a potential conflict of interest.

Evaluators engaged by the SEU shall not have had any responsibility for the design, implementation, or supervision of any of the projects, programs, or policies that they are evaluating.

Under exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to engage an evaluator who has a past connection with the object of the evaluation, for example where there is very small pool of competent experts. In such a case, measures to safeguard the integrity of the evaluation shall be adopted and such measures shall be disclosed in the evaluation report. The Head of the Evaluation Unit shall ensure that the evaluator in question is not appointed as Evaluation Manager/Officer or evaluation team leader.

The SEU shall avoid any conflict of interest, which might arise, or appear to arise, as a result of the acceptance of any form of external support or assistance. The Head of the Evaluation Unit shall carefully assess any offer of assistance to ensure the necessary independence of judgement from any contributing parties and to prevent any undue influence over the work of the Evaluation Unit.

## Honesty and Integrity

Successful evaluation depends on the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process. Evaluators shall:

- a. Accurately represent their level of skills and knowledge and work only within the limits of their professional training and abilities in evaluation, declining assignments for which they do not have the skills and experience to successfully complete.
- b. Negotiate honestly the costs, tasks to be undertaken, limitations of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and uses of data resulting from the evaluation.
- c. Accurately present their procedures, data, and findings, including ensuring that the evaluation findings are not biased to make it more likely that the Evaluator receives further commissions from the Client.
- d. As far as possible, prevent or correct misuse of their work by others.
- e. Decline evaluation assignments where the Client is unresponsive to their expressed concerns that the evaluation methodology or procedures are likely to produce a misleading result. (If declining the assignment is not feasible, the Evaluator shall record his/her dissent either in the evaluation report or otherwise).

## Accountability

Evaluators are accountable for the completion of the evaluation as agreed with the Client. Specifically, evaluators shall:

- a. Complete the evaluation deliverables within the timeframe and budget agreed.
- b. Exercise prudence and probity in fiscal decision-making so that evaluation expenditures are properly accounted for and the Client receives value for money.
- c. Give the Evaluation Manager early notice of any change to the evaluation plan or any risks to the successful completion of the evaluation and record the reasons for any changes made to the evaluation plan.

## OBLIGATIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

### Respect for Dignity and Diversity

Evaluators shall:

- a. Respect differences in culture, local customs, religious beliefs and practices, personal interaction, gender roles, disability, age, and ethnicity, and be mindful of the potential implications of these differences when planning, carrying out and reporting on evaluations, while using evaluation instruments appropriate to the cultural setting.
- b. Keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained, providing the maximum notice to individuals or institutions they wish to engage in the evaluation, optimizing demands on their time, and respecting people’s right to privacy.

## Rights

In including individuals or groups in the evaluation, evaluators shall ensure:

- a. **Right to Self-Determination.** Prospective participants should be treated as autonomous agents and must be given the time and information to decide whether they wish to participate and be able to make an independent decision without any pressure or fear of penalty for not participating.
- b. **Fair Representation.** Evaluators shall select participants fairly in relation to the aims of the evaluation, not simply because of their availability, or because it is relatively easy to secure their participation. Care shall be taken to ensure that hidden or otherwise excluded groups are represented.
- c. **Compliance with codes for vulnerable groups.** Where the evaluation involves the participation of members of vulnerable groups, evaluators must be aware of and comply with legal codes (whether international or national) governing, for example, interviewing children and young people.

## Confidentiality

Evaluators shall respect people’s right to provide information in confidence and make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality. Evaluators must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source so that the relevant individuals are protected from reprisals.

## Avoidance of Harm

Evaluations can have a negative effect on their objects or those who participate in them. Therefore, evaluators shall seek to: minimize risks to, and burdens on, those participating in the evaluation; and seek to maximize the benefits and reduce any unnecessary harms that might occur from negative or critical evaluation, without compromising the integrity of the evaluation.

## EVALUATION PROCESS AND PRODUCT

### Accuracy, Completeness and Reliability

Evaluators have an obligation to ensure that evaluation reports and presentations are accurate, complete, and reliable. In the evaluation process and in the production of evaluation products, evaluators shall:

- a. Carry out thorough inquiries, systematically employing appropriate methods and techniques to the highest technical standards, validating information using multiple measures and sources to guard against bias, and ensuring errors are corrected.
- b. Describe the purposes and content of object of the evaluation (programme, activity, strategy) clearly and accurately.
- c. Present openly the values, assumptions, theories, methods, results, and analyses that significantly affect the evaluation, from its initial conceptualization to the eventual use of findings.
- d. Examine the context in enough detail so its likely influences can be identified (for example geographic location, timing, political and social climate, economic conditions).
- e. Describe the methodology, procedures, and information sources of the evaluation in enough detail so they can be identified and assessed.
- f. Make a complete and fair assessment of the object of the evaluation, recording of strengths and weaknesses so that strengths can be built upon, and problem areas addressed.
- g. Provide an estimate of the reliability of information gathered and the replicability of results (i.e. How likely is it that the evaluation repeated in the same way would yield the same result?).
- h. Explicitly justify judgements, findings and conclusions and show their underlying rationale so that stakeholders can assess them.
- i. Ensure all recommendations are based on the evaluation findings only, not on their or other parties' biases.

## Transparency

Transparency and consultation with the stakeholders are essential features of evaluation. The Evaluation Unit and the evaluator shall clearly communicate to stakeholders the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria applied and the intended use of findings.

Stakeholders shall be consulted on the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation and their views taken into account in the final TOR. The Evaluation Manager shall carefully balance the views and requirements of stakeholders, ensuring that the evaluation retains a clear focus and that sound evaluation principles are not compromised by the wishes of stakeholders.

Evaluation methodology shall be disclosed in advance of the evaluation and clearly described in the evaluation report, including the assumptions and values underlying the evaluator's judgements.

Evaluation documents shall be easily readable and specify their information sources and approaches.



Evaluation reports shall make the link between evidence, findings, conclusions, and recommendations transparent, persuasive and proportionate to the body of evidence collected.

## Reporting

The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and to any others with legitimate claims or rights to receive the results, in relevant language(s).

As a norm, all evaluation reports shall be made available within MSF. The Head of SEU shall ensure high standards in accessibility and presentation of reports and use a range of channels to reach audiences through, for example, electronic and interactive channels, knowledge networks, communities of practice, presentations at relevant conferences, as well as appropriate publications.

At country level, evaluation findings shall be presented and discussed at the appropriate national or local level, to enable stakeholders to respond to them, and ideally before the evaluation report is complete.

All materials generated in the conduct of the evaluation are the property of the SEU and can only be used by permission. Responsibility for distribution and publication of evaluation results rests with the SEU.

Original data, including interview records and meeting notes will be retained in confidential files until completion of the evaluation. The Head of SEU shall determine an appropriate time on a case by cases basis for further retention, after which such data shall be securely disposed of in accordance with MSF policy on the disposal of records<sup>2</sup>. Databases of unpublished information on individual project activities shall be securely stored in the Evaluation Unit and available for use only by the Unit's staff and consultants, and only released to consultants in a manner which will maintain confidentiality and evaluation integrity.

## Omissions and wrongdoing

Where evaluators find evidence of wrongdoing or unethical conduct, they are obliged to report it, whether such conduct relates directly to the evaluation ToR or not. Evaluators shall inform the Head of Evaluation Unit who will decide on the most appropriate channel for reporting wrongdoing. In exigent circumstances, the evaluator may contact the commissioning organization's internal complaint management mechanism. Details of any wrongdoing, including names or events, shall only be divulged to the proper oversight authority.

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to MSF SE's policy on data privacy and GDPR.

## OBLIGATIONS OF EVALUATION MANAGERS/OFFICERS AND COMMISSIONERS

Over and above evaluators' responsibilities, Evaluation Managers/Officers and Commissioners have specific duties, including those listed in the following two sections below, respectively.

### **EVALUATION MANAGERS/OFFICERS HAVE A DUTY TO:**

- a. Appoint trustworthy, competent, and independent-minded evaluators with the appropriate mix of experience, expertise, and competencies, and with an appropriate diversity in gender, ethnicity, religion, and language.
- b. Consult with evaluators and other interest groups if significant changes are required to the design or delivery of the evaluation.
- c. Provide the evaluators with access to the documentation and data required for evaluation purposes.
- d. Communicate openly and have respect for people involved in the evaluation and keep the evaluation Commissioner and consultation group informed of changes in circumstances affecting the evaluation.
- e. Respect the evaluators' duty to keep their sources of information anonymous.
- f. Anticipate the different positions of various interest groups and minimise attempts to curtail the evaluation or bias or misapply the results.
- g. Design the evaluation to encourage stakeholders to follow-through and maximize the use of the evaluation results.
- h. Provide all evaluation team members with an opportunity to disassociate themselves from particular judgements, and recommendations, with unresolved differences of opinion within the team acknowledged in the evaluation report.

### **EVALUATION COMMISSIONERS HAVE A DUTY TO:**

- a. Endorse the reason, purpose, scope, and objectives of the evaluation.
- b. Endorse the composition of the consultation group and the evaluation focal point.
- c. Facilitate agreement between consultation group members during the revision processes (ToR, Inception Report, Final Report and Recommendations) and arbitrate within the Consultation Group if necessary.

- d. Endorse the final version of ToR (budget included) and issue the Evaluation Order to the SEU.
- e. Endorse the Inception Report and Final Report.
- f. Respond to the recommendations and accept or reject them and take responsibility to follow-up their implementations.
- g. Endorse the proposed dissemination strategy of the Final Evaluation report.

## Annex 1: Source Material

1. GEF Evaluation Office Ethical Guidelines, November 6, 2006
2. CIDA evaluation manual
3. American Evaluation Society Guiding Principles for Evaluators
4. Canadian Evaluation Society Guidelines for Ethical Conduct
5. Standards for Evaluation in the UN System, UNEG 2005
6. Guidelines for evaluation commissioners, UK Evaluation Society
7. Programme Evaluation Standards (from UNICEF evaluation training module)
8. Presentation: 'Commissioning and managing evaluations', Nordic Consulting Group, EES-UKES 2006 Joint International Conference, London, UK, October 2006
9. Sourcebook for Evaluating Global and Regional Partnership Programs - Indicative Principles and Standards: Chapter Ethical and Professional Conduct of Evaluations Principles and Norms, World Bank, 2006
10. Ethical Guidelines for Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents – USAID, Horizons, Family Health International, UNICEF (draft 2004)]
11. An Ethics Framework for MSF. Medical Ethics and Beyond, Doris Shopper and Richard Bedell, MSF 2007
12. MSF Behavioural Commitment
13. MSF Evaluation Manual, Vienna Evaluation Unit, 2012

## Annex 2: MSF Behavioural Commitments

### Definitions

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#### Assignment

It is considered to be ‘on assignment’:

1. Any staff member, in the following circumstances:
  - a. when he/she is performing duties for MSF inside or outside of his/her usual place of work, and/or
  - b. he/she is present on MSF premises, and/or
  - c. during his/her working hours.
2. At all times, any staff member being perceived as a member of or representing MSF. This includes:
  - when using MSF cars or wearing MSF signs of identification
  - when being assigned in a location different from his/her place of recruitment (international staff and any other staff being temporarily or permanently relocated in order to perform duties for MSF)
  - all members of MSF leadership, all board members of MSF entities, all GDs, all Directors or Heads of departments in all entities, all advocacy and representation staff and all coordinators.

#### Children

- Article 4 of the MSF Behavioural Commitments states: “MSF staff members and partners shall not accept child abuse, exploitation and violence and not engage in sexual relations with children;”
- The definition of children comes from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. This means that the age under which an individual is considered as a child can vary from one country to another.
- In terms of implementation, this means that each MSF entity will apply the article of the Behavioural Commitments according to the local laws applicable to the child. For international staff, the law applicable in the country issuing the employment contract must also be respected.

#### Staff members and operational partners - Scope

- **Members of staff:** all employees on assignment, volunteers, daily workers.
- **Operational partners:** consultants, any staff receiving incentives (MoH, NGOs...) and guests (visitors on MSF projects and offices such as journalists, visiting scientists or major donors).
- The Behavioural Commitments also apply to all **Associative members and dependants of international staff** located in the country of mission.

## MSF's Behavioural Commitments

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### Preamble

MSF considers itself a responsible employer and association, and this rests on the responsible behaviour of its members. There is a mutual and complementary role of the employee and the employer to prevent, detect and address unacceptable behaviour and MSF staff should deploy the means to inform its patients and direct beneficiaries on the behavioural commitments stated below. Within MSF, all members of staff (employees, including staff on international assignment, volunteers, daily workers) and operational partners (including consultants and guests) understand and adhere to the commitments below, incorporate them into their professional and personal conduct, and abide by them. Should this not be the case, MSF offers channels for reporting at every level of the organisation and any non-compliance will entail due consequences. These Behavioural Commitments are considered as a minimum behavioural standard, more specific rules may apply to MSF staff members depending on the context in which they work and their area of activity.

### Behavioural Commitments

1. MSF staff members and operational partners shall behave respectfully and not discriminate against patients, colleagues or members of the local population on the basis of their race, opinions, lifestyle, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, origin, religion or beliefs and other markers of identity;
2. MSF staff members and operational partners shall not abuse anyone physically (i.e. physical violence, sexual aggression or other form of physical abuse) or psychologically (e.g. bullying, abuse of power, harassment, discrimination or favouritism);
3. MSF staff members and operational partners shall not accept, under any circumstances, behaviour that exploits the vulnerability of others, in the broadest possible sense (sexual, economic, social, etc.). This includes exchange of goods, benefits or services for acts of a sexual nature, including the use of sex workers' services while on assignment;
4. MSF staff members and operational partners shall not accept child abuse, exploitation and violence and not engage in sexual relations with children<sup>3</sup>;
5. MSF staff members and operational partners shall not take advantage of their position for personal gain. Each member shall use MSF resources (including premises, goods, money, reputation, image etc.) with respect and care and in the interests of the organisation and the populations it seeks to assist.

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<sup>3</sup> Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 1: "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."

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Médecins Sans Frontières

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This document was prepared and produced by the Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU) in March 2020 and formatted in May 2022.

The current guideline is an adapted version of the 2008 United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations. Only minimal changes were done to use specific MSF terminology and frame of reference.

The UNEG is an interagency professional network that brings together the evaluation units of the UN system, including UN departments, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and affiliated organizations. The UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation were formally approved by UNEG members at the UNEG Annual General Meeting 2008. They are in line with the main international standards of ethical frameworks for evaluation.

Cover photo: @MSF Switzerland, Yemen, 2019. Title: Medical activities in Hodeidah, Al Salakhana hospital.  
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