



Stockholm Evaluation Unit – Guidelines

# EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

## SEU Steering Committee Paper

April 2022

## INTRODUCTION

In 2006, at the landmark La Mancha meeting, MSF agreed to seek active transparency and accountability to improve the relevance, effectiveness, and quality of its interventions. The result has been an increased investment in developing evaluation capacity in the organization. OCB has invested, with the key support of MSF Sweden, in the Stockholm Evaluation Unit to develop evaluation capacities in direct support to our operations. This capacity should be seen first and foremost as a direct support to field teams and support teams in HQ to learn from our practices and to improve the quality and pertinence of our operational/medical intervention.

## EVALUATION AT OCB

### WHY DO WE EVALUATE?

We commonly talk about evaluation as a **tool for accountability and learning** because by asking questions about how good (or bad) something is providing an essential part of the oversight and accountability. Continuing to ask questions about **why things are that way**, evaluation is a valuable source of learning. In OCB this self-reflection and self-criticism is in our DNA. Evaluation provides a way to make this more systematically available in order to broader audiences both within MSF and externally.

### WHAT IS EVALUATION FOR OCB?

For OCB, evaluation is about assessing the design, strategy, implementation, and results of our medical and humanitarian interventions, measured against established MSF or international standards. They should not be overly focus on process or governance other than the extent to which these are part of the medical and humanitarian intervention being evaluated.

### WHAT ISN'T EVALUATION?

The boundary between evaluation and other evaluative exercises is not a clear one and they can often be confused with capitalizations, audits, research, to name but a few. There are however key differences in terms of purpose, use and methodology which are important when understanding how conclusions are reached. **Capitalizations** aim to capitalize on the lived experience and engage those who have been involved in the project. In MSF it is about recording experiences, ways of working, tools and standard operating procedures for use of people who need to implement similar projects in the future. They are very much like **lessons learned** in the English-speaking world. These processes are often internal but can be facilitated by an external actor. Although it may use the same methods, **research** is about generating generalizable knowledge or moving theoretical thought forward. It is work which makes a distinct contribution to the knowledge base or practice of science through original thought, or the discovery of new facts or by the application of existing theories in new situations of significance. **Audits** look at adherence to process and procedure and intend to contribute to financial accountability as opposed to accountability for the objectives.

## HOW DO WE EVALUATE?

Every evaluation is unique in terms of the purpose, the nature of the thing being evaluated, the questions being asked and the context in which it takes place. For this reason, every evaluation needs to be designed to respond to the specific questions people have. The TORs need to be discussed and elaborated in a collaborative process with field, cell and SEU involved. The organization of the evaluation is in the hands of the SEU. They are the experts in terms of evaluations techniques and methodology. They are continually looking for ways to avoid heavy and bureaucratic evaluations and find lighter ways that are better adapted to OCB and the contexts in which we work.

## HOW DO WE USE EVALUATIONS?

There are commonly four types of use associated with an evaluation; **instrumental use** is when findings are used directly in decision making. Normally this is in the form of recommendations which can come from the evaluator or developed collaboratively based on the findings, **conceptual use** is when people associated with the program understand the program in new ways after reading the report, **persuasive use** is where evaluation results are used to support or justify a decision (both in legitimate ways and less legitimate ways), and **process use** when cognitive, behavioral, program and organizational changes come as a result from the process of evaluating (i.e. people see things differently having been through a structured interview).

An evaluation can have more than one use, and this can be different for different people, simultaneously. The ways in which an individual evaluation is used by OCB can vary based on the needs, interest, and position of the reader. Sometimes, one evaluation can satisfy different people's different needs, but sometimes it will not. In such cases, we can think about what we evaluate in a different way.

## WHAT DO WE WANT TO EVALUATE AND WHEN?

OCB adopts a **by default** approach to evaluations where all projects should be evaluated during their lifespan unless there is a well justified reason not to do so. In this way we strive to learn from our successes and from our shortcomings. We will ensure that we are providing the opportunity for different types of learning and use, for everybody involved. The project and the specifics of the context determine what there is to know and learn. Without necessarily being an exhaustive list, the possible focus areas below are designed to inform and support the decision-making process and ensure that the focus remains on our priority areas.

## FOCUS AREAS

- **Mid-term evaluations**: Mid-term evaluations take place once a project's activities are up and running and once there are clear outputs and provisional outcomes being achieved. This is normally intended for multi-year projects and where clear commitment remains and there is still a possibility to adjust programming. It can be particularly useful when there have been significant changes in objectives/context/activities since the Copro (Comité de Projet – project committee) or the last evaluation, or in projects where a significant reorientation is foreseen. Mid-term

evaluations focus on specifics of the context and are geared towards instrumental use and decision making. These are often called formative evaluations.

- **End of project:** End of Project evaluations take place once the project has been completed and outputs/outcomes clear, and the intention is in part to evaluate whether objectives have been achieved. Ideally all 'projects by choice' or projects reaching the end of a cycle should be evaluated as part of handover or closure strategy. These evaluations have an important role on organizational accountability and can also be extremely useful for capturing lessons which can be applied in other contexts. These are often called summative evaluations.
- **Pilot projects and activities (including innovations):** Pilot projects (activities, etc.) are a good opportunity to learn and an evaluation should always be conducted in order to capture the learning and support the future decisions that guide project development. The evaluations can focus on context specific learning or generalization to other contexts and are geared towards instrumental use.
- **Emergency projects:** Emergency projects are based on rapid deployment according to pre-conceived scenarios or E-prep planning. These projects present both unique opportunities to learn yet have unique challenges to evaluate. Real-time Evaluation (RTE) should be systematic in emergencies in order to check assumptions and help inform future strategy. In most instances RTE would take place in the window between 3 and 6 months after implementation.
- **Transversal thematic or Model of Care:** These evaluations focus on areas where two or more projects have the same activities and comparison is possible. The area of focus can include Models of Care (e.g. Victim of Torture - VOT, Non-Communicable Diseases - NCD) or thematic areas (e.g. migration). Specifically, they are useful when the area of focus is relatively new to MSF and still being fine-tuned. Evaluations are geared towards transversal learning and aim to inform decisions on the level of policy.

## MODALITIES

OCB is presently implementing 70 projects where the relevant timing and scope of an evaluation naturally will differ. The capacity of the SEU will require us to plan and prioritize over the years. As a guideline, the number of evaluations anticipated for 2020 and beyond is between fifteen and twenty per year. This is to ensure good coverage, maintain capacity for unplanned evaluation and work within the current available resources.

A list of evaluations for the coming year (and subsequent years) will be identified as a part of the ARO (Annual Review of Operations) process. The list will be managed jointly by the Directors of Operations and the Manager of the Stockholm Evaluation Unit who between them may revise the list according to needs. If they are not in agreement, arbitration, and the final decision falls to the Steering Committee.

During the year, evaluation should be discussed and debated as part of all COPROs to assess the pertinence to incorporate an evaluation at a specific point in time. These discussions can lead to an unplanned evaluation or go into the evaluation plans for future years.

### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- The evaluation unit will safeguard capacity for unplanned evaluations wherever possible and a decision to proceed in such situations lies jointly with the Director of Operations and the Manager of the SEU. Arbitration rests with the Steering Committee if required.
- For longer projects, those with a life cycle of five years or more, more than one evaluation would be expected to be sure to capture changes in the external context as well as operational priorities.
- All operational evaluations should be managed by the Stockholm Evaluation Unit.
- To be able to meet that goal, we need to increase the awareness around evaluations at field level and in the HQ. Both the Stockholm unit and the OPS and Medical Department have a role to promote and disseminate the practice and results of evaluation.
- In the remit of the OCB Board's responsibility to make the executive accountable, the OCB Board will have the space and the possibility to request specific evaluations in relation to the OCB portfolio.

Stockholm Evaluation Unit  
<http://evaluation.msf.org/>  
Médecins Sans Frontières

APRIL 2022

This document was prepared and produced by the Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU). It is the SEU's Steering Committee paper drafted in 2019.

Cover photo: @MSF France, Ethiopia, 2014. Title: Lietchuor permanent camp South Sudanese in Gambella region.  
Photographer: Aloys Vimard.