

# REOCCURRING THEMES

## IN OCB EVALUATIONS 2022

The Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU) has reviewed ten evaluations that the unit managed during 2022 to identify reoccurring themes.

### INTRODUCTION

The Stockholm Evaluation Unit (SEU) examined ten evaluations that the unit managed in 2022 to identify reoccurring themes across these. These evaluations were commissioned by OCB.

The SEU analysed the evaluations by gathering the conclusions and recommendations into one document, and then tagging them with key words. Key words that reoccurred most were grouped into themes. Subsequently, these were gathered under the headings: project management, resource management, operational approaches, and project outcomes<sup>1</sup>.

2022's reoccurring themes were as follow:

| KEY WORDS  | THEMES                | HEADINGS               |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Needs assessment, project design                             | Planning              | Project management     |
| Monitoring, Data, Information and knowledge management (IKM) | Monitoring            |                        |
| Capacity building, Exit Strategy, Sustainability             | Exit strategies       |                        |
| Staff capacity, HR model, Staffing policies, HR gaps         | Human resources       | Resource management    |
| Use of available resources                                   | Resource allocation   |                        |
| Time planned and used  | Timelines             |                        |
| Strategies, Effect   | Advocacy              | Operational approaches |
| National, Internal, International                            | Collaboration         |                        |
| Consultation, community-based activities                     | Community engagement  |                        |
| Decision making, Agility, Decentralization                   | Strategies            | Project outcomes       |
| Strategies, Conceptualising, Evidence                        | Change                |                        |
| Missed opportunities, Reaching results                       | Effective programming |                        |

This paper presents the themes that reoccur most often (based on a quantitative analysis) across the evaluations and lists them together with the findings and or recommendations related to that specific theme. They are not listed in any specific order. There are some overlaps between key words; for example, “change” appears both under planning/project management as well as under project management. This suggests a need to not focus on addressing one area, but rather to work across all themes for achieving better programming.

<sup>1</sup> These headings are similar to those identified in the analysis of 2017-2021 evaluations that was presented at the 2021 Evaluation Day. At that time, the SEU grouped reoccurring themes by the following headings: Analysis, Organizational set-up, Project Management and Project Quality.

It is interesting to note not just the themes, but also the key words that better illustrate the meaning of the theme. Under each theme subheading appears a short narrative describing the content and synthesis of individual conclusions/findings.

## RECURRING THEMES



### Project management

This section encompasses three themes that are basic areas of project management, and all three are present in OCB's own operational project cycle (presented 2021<sup>2</sup>): planning, monitoring and exit strategies.

#### Planning

Planning refers mainly to the work done before launching a project, including the conceptualization. Based on the key words identified in the evaluations, the theme is quite like OCB's project cycle segments analysis and project design.

- Evaluations suggest that **needs assessments** are important for defining assumptions, guiding decision making, and creating pre-conditions for improved efficiency.
- Elements exploring **project design** included better defining results, working evidence based and developing theories of change. The latter appeared across several evaluations.

#### Monitoring

This section considers monitoring information and knowledge management (as it contributes to the same goals that monitoring activities have).

- Issues related to the theme **monitoring** were essentially lifted in every evaluation, including the Meta-evaluation. Specifically, it speaks to systems and mechanisms, processes, specific input on the nature and quality of indicators, the ability to measure results and finally a recommendation to increase in house capacity to support monitoring.

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<sup>2</sup> The project cycle includes Analysis, Project Design, Implementation and Monitoring, with Evaluation and Exit Strategies referred as well. For OCB's internal audience, it is available at <https://sherlog.msf.org/articles/7842/ocb-operational-project-planning.html>

- With regards to indicators, of which there was a lot of mention, recommendations include ensuring that the type of indicators facilitate data collection that is fit for purpose (i.e., making them more operational, including developing more qualitative indicators), agreeing on indicators and standards with partners, and to review applicable OCB standard indicators.
- Evaluations referring to **IKM** captures three issues: reliability of data, access to data, and use of data for learning and upholding institutional memory.

### Exit strategies

Nearly all evaluations speak on what happens after MSF leaves a project site by discussing efforts needed around assuring exit strategies are in place, and that they will be effective.

- More specifically, recommendations on exit strategies call for working in partnership with an eye on capacity building and then an eventual transfer (handover) to guarantee continuity of the services established or advancements made.
- In many evaluations, conclusions and recommendations address a lack of an exit strategy calling for these to be formulated and showing how they could be planned and conceptualised.
- Last, evaluations consider risks related to MSF closing a project, including if this were to be done prematurely.

| FINDING/RECOMMENDATION   | KEY WORDS         | THEME      |
|--|-------------------|------------|
| While the project was highly relevant to its context in Iraq, the evaluation results highlight the importance of conducting a comprehensive needs assessment prior to the start of the advocacy-focused project. These assessments are important as they are linked to the ability of the project team to adopt the right assumptions about the project context and by connecting the needs and how MSF can respond to these needs to a good understanding of all potential influencing factors that would likely affect the results and outcomes. (BATBE) | Needs assessments | Planning   |
| Without clarity around what is to be achieved and for whom, the impact and added value of MSF’s investments is substantially reduced. (RECON)  | Project design    |            |
| Develop an explicit theory of change and logic model to justify the choice of the decentralization initiative and its corresponding phases, strategies, and activities. ...This would enhance the effectiveness, potential impact, and sustainability of the initiative and ensure common understanding by all partners. (KANAN)   |                   |            |
| If the SEU expects improvements to the evaluability of medical humanitarian interventions with at least the existence of consistent operations project monitoring of activity, output, and outcome-level data, then the SEU needs to lead out and model that expectation in that equivalent process of the monitoring of evaluation activity, output, and outcome-level data. (METAE)  | Systems           | Monitoring |
| Difficulties in monitoring activities were noted, including reporting with several missing documents and a Tier.net database that did not allow the encoding of all data relevant to the monitoring of PMTCT activities. (HIVGU)   |                   |            |

|   |            |                 |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| In addition, the process to analyse and present the collected data seems to be too complicated. MSF could have rather concentrated its efforts on analysing and reporting, in a sufficiently frequent manner, the key information or problematic targets. (BEIRA)   | Process    |                 |
| Revise some indicators to make them more operational, some being adapted to inform the development of PMTCT strategies but less to monitor the PMTCT activities of an HIV project; ...Adapt the PMTCT indicators of each MSF project according to the package of activities deployed, involving the expansion of the standard OCB list of indicators but also the removal of less relevant indicators, such as children born alive from HIV-positive mothers. (HIVGU) | Indicators |                 |
| Include qualitative indicators in the assessment of the quality of decentralized care to assess the satisfaction of beneficiaries and regularly collect their feedback. (HIVKI)   |            |                 |
| Documentation should be accessible to all who need it... Ensure that documents are translated into the required language and that non-technical language is used in guidance. (CMSTR)   | IKM        |                 |
| Improve the preparation of MSF's disengagement to increase the chances of sustainability of the results obtained by supporting quality improvement in decentralized structures these skills even after MSF's disengagement, but economic sustainability does not seem to be possible in the absence of cost-recovery mechanisms, as HIV services are theoretically free. (HIVKI)  | Risks      | Exit Strategies |
| In terms of institutional capacity, MSF did not conduct any formal assessment of MoH capacity to handover AHD component activities. (BEIRA)   | Handover   |                 |
| To contribute to the improvement of the health system both local and national, a handover must be staged, to reflect the ability of staff and structures to support the process and successfully operate the facility. (CMSTR)  |            |                 |
| Define the PMTCT strategy over the period 2021 – 2025 including the exit strategy/ process of a possible transfer of responsibility regarding PMTCT to another actor (HIVGUI)   |            |                 |

## Resource Management

Overarchingly, resource management and more specifically the themes thereto related, all speak to a project's efficiency.

### Human Resources

- **Human resources** refer to the key words staff capacity, the HR model, staffing policies and HR gaps. While conclusions and recommendations spoke to the competency and capacity of staff, one evaluation concluded that the HR strategy, working primarily with national staff, was the reason the project (decentralization of HIV care) was efficient.

## Resource Allocation

- **Resource allocations** considers when evaluators feel MSF has made effective use of available resources. The ability to assess efficiency, notably because of how budgets are devised, is an area where evaluations recommend improvement.
- Finally, evaluations raised ambitious **timelines** as a challenge for MSF, where time designated is not always enough to reach the quality and results wished for.
- This theme overlapped with issues related to monitoring, working evidence based, internal collaboration and the ability to work effectively (achieving planned project results).

| FINDING/RECOMMENDATION   | KEY WORD                     | THEMES              |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------|
| MSF's HR sourcing approach was one of the main factors contributing to the DRTB project implementation process and outcomes. ...The evaluation of the DRTB project revealed the importance of recruiting staff who can understand and deal with the context and apply an appropriate approach to manage change and deal with resistance. (BATBE) | Staff Capacity               | Human Resources     |
| The number of MSF staff directly involved in AHD activities at facilities makes the intervention cost intensive on the human resources side. (BEIRA)   | HR Model                     |                     |
| ...changes in quality of care and the use of local human resources seem to confirm that the decentralization approach was efficient. (HIVKI)   |                              |                     |
| Organize the classification of expenditure on decentralization according to the care structures supported and the different areas supported (training, laboratory, pharmacies, etc.) and extract estimates of the cost of quality decentralization for future projects or scale-up needs; (HIVKI)  | Ability to assess efficiency | Resource allocation |
| MSF OCB should be careful not overextend itself, as the need/demand for RS is very large but the resources to provide quality care (human, material, technical and financial) are limited. (RECON)   |                              |                     |
| High staff turnover is a continuous problem. High staff turnover leads to loss of information and frequent shifts in strategy which disrupts ongoing activities, creates unforeseen budget and timeline implications, causes frustration among the staff, and dilutes accountability. (CMSTR)  | HR Turnover                  |                     |
| Consider if the set targets for the allocated time are realistic given the delays and challenges. ...The allocated time frame and resources might need reconsidering to achieve the desired target. (HEPKA)  | Timeline                     |                     |

## Operational approaches

OCB projects implement different operational approaches for reaching project goals, not limited to the themes explored here: advocacy, collaboration, community engagement and strategic choices.

## Advocacy

- On **advocacy**, evaluations considered both advocacy plans and strategies – and primarily whether there was one and how it was created, as well as the effect of advocacy efforts.

## Collaboration

- Collaboration** was an area with a lot of recommendations exploring internal, national, and international connections, examining how OCB works with – or ought to work with others. Internally, better defining the project’s scope and key concepts was an important precursor to fostering more coherence. On a national level, this collaboration included both working closer with governmental counterparts and other non-governmental organizations.

## Community engagement

- Much like the SEU’s exploration of **community engagement** during the 2021 evaluation day, evaluations from 2023 spoke on working in the community (community-based activities) and working with the community (such as conducting consultations).

## Strategies

- Finally, conclusions and recommendations on the three specific **strategies** decision-making, agility and decentralization explored initiatives OCB has implemented to drive projects towards effective and impactful effect.

| FINDING/RECOMMENDATION  | KEY WORDS          | THEMES        |
|---|--------------------|---------------|
| It is essential to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment before the commencement of the project targeting advocacy efforts. (BATBE)  | Plan               | Advocacy      |
| The fact that MSF OCB contributed to the creation of national AHD guidelines is a remarkable achievement, with high impact potential, beyond the direct implementation of medical services. The MSF experience on AHD in Beira could have been, however, further disseminated at national and provincial levels. This represents a missed opportunity, especially when considering the uniqueness of MSF AHD experience in Mozambique. (BEIRA)  | Effect             |               |
| Current communication patterns between individual departments and between the HQ and the field have resulted in inclusive engagement, but also in teams described as working in silos. Critical input from the medical personnel is often missing or insufficient. Healthcare approaches supported by the facilities must be adaptable enough to respond to temporary shifts in healthcare needs. This necessitates practical collaboration between departments, but it should be established during the design phase and maintained throughout the project (CMSTR) | Internal coherence | Collaboration |

|   |                  |                      |
|---|------------------|----------------------|
| <p>What was surprising to the evaluators was how little the projects interacted and coordinated with each other – there is a wealth of knowledge and experience that can (and should) be shared, which was unfortunately not happening. (RECON)</p>   |                  |                      |
| <p>Catalytic change can only be achieved collectively, with key stakeholders working in collaboration creating momentum in a unanimous direction. Key stakeholders (including Cell, SAMU, Mission, Machar Colony and Baldia project team, Advocacy, Comms) should work collaboratively to further clarify the catalytic objectives of the strategy and plan how these will be achieved (HEPKA)</p>                        |                  |                      |
| <p>Strengthen the existing coordination and collaboration with different actors (NGOs, community-based organizations, etc.) and expand it to new ones to enhance patient’s follow-up and continuum of care. (BEIRA)</p>   | External         |                      |
| <p>Reinforce collaboration with all stakeholders: Consulting the local community and engaging it in the design and construction process increases community acceptance and the value to be gained from MSF’s investment. It also ensures that facilities are sustainable, aligned with cultural practices and fit with the local, regional and national health system. (CMSTR)</p>  | Consultation     | Community engagement |
| <p>Consider using an integrated health promotion approach instead of relying on door-to-door awareness raising. This would have the potential to improve the effectiveness of community outreach activities. (KANAN)</p>  | Community based  |                      |
| <p>Decentralization in its fullest sense includes decision-making, resource allocation, and service provision and is ongoing process that requires good design and buy-in from all stakeholders. (KANAN)</p>  | Decision making  | Strategies           |
| <p>The agile project management approach adopted by MSF for the DRTB project was appropriate and helped maintain the project’s relevance and engagement with partners. (BATBE)</p>  | Agility          |                      |
| <p>The decentralization of quality has solved the problem of insufficient quality of care in peripheral structures, marked mainly by high rates of PLHIV lost sight of, thus confirming the relevance of the intervention on decentralization. ...Develop a strategy or guidelines on the organization of decentralization with the different possible standard approaches and the activities they include... (HIVKI)</p> | Decentralization |                      |

## Project Outcomes

Project outcomes relate both to how and whether changes occur, and projects are effective.

### Change

- On **change**, evaluations noted the need for change management strategies, conceptualizing how change occurs and the role of evidence in planning for change.

## Effectiveness

- Evaluations that spoke on **effectiveness**, cited examples both of projects reaching their goals and thus being effective, as well as where it was felt opportunities were missed to better deliver.

| FINDING/RECOMMENDATION   | KEY WORDS            | THEMES                |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|
| ...there is lack of consistent understanding and planning of how the results achieved in these sites can be utilised to create a bigger systemic change and health impact... The evaluation respondents highlighted the need to have evidence on the significance of outcomes as well as the cost effectiveness of the models of care, to support effective translation (HEPKA)                  | Evidence             | Change                |
| While in-facility aspects of patients with AHD management were attentively addressed... limited efforts were made to follow-up patients with AHD after discharge from BCH and to support patients' adherence. Similarly, reasons for patients' mortality were not necessarily explored neither sufficiently addressed. These are important gaps which limited the overall effectiveness. (BEIRA) | Missed opportunities | Effective programming |
| Though it is still early stages of implementation, current data on the key performance indicators (objectively verifiable indicators) suggest progress is on track. (HEPKA)  | Reaching results     |                       |
| The effectiveness of support for decentralisation was assessed by the high overall performance rates for decentralised structures, the decrease in loss of follow-up rates, and high retention rates in care confirming the effectiveness of MSF support for decentralisation, although the issue of sustainability of effects remains a major challenge. (HIVKI)                                |                      |                       |

## Takeaways

This section explores some of the themes that appeared more prominently across the evaluations.

**Planning** primarily encompassed needs assessment and project design, and within these calls for theories of change (ToCs) to conceptualize and plan for change were noted. Important elements of a theoretical approach to planning for change appeared, such as making visible and monitoring assumptions. As it is closely related to change, elements related to ToCs also appeared under the heading - project outcomes, and specifically under preconditions for achieving results.

Aspects related to **change** were not included in the SEU's previous review of recurring themes (of evaluations 2017-2021). It is likely that it is an increased understanding of change (including the 2022 Evaluation Day on catalyst projects) that contributed to it emerging through this analysis.

**Collaboration** emerged quite significantly in the evaluations in 2022, on different levels, but mostly internally. Predominantly, the evaluations spoke to a potential for increased effectiveness as well as internal learning if internal coherence and collaboration were to increase. Better defining key aspects of the projects recurs as a precondition for better internal coherence. Related, and captured under the heading *operational approaches*, community engagement was noted in the conclusions and recommendations. These spoke to working in and working with the community, but also picked up on



the need for ensuring opportunities for patients and communities to provide feedback and input into programming.

**Monitoring** is an often-reoccurring theme in OCB evaluations, partially because the lack of available data also affects the quality of evaluations. Generally, the majority of evaluations deliver conclusions or recommendations suggesting that monitoring systems are not functioning well and are not able to generate data that can serve as a basis for continual assessment and or decision making. Systems, processes, tools, and capacity seem to be areas where OCB needs to improve to address this.

Finally, there were several themes that emerged strongly at least in part because of the type of evaluations that OCB commissioned, as well as the evaluation approach used. In 2022, the SEU managed three evaluations related to HIV care, where at least two implement a strategy of **decentralization** – leading there to be a number of conclusions and recommendations on this operational strategy. The SEU and perhaps even more so many evaluators that the SEU works with continue to use normative project evaluation criteria, such as the ALNAP criteria, leading to several reoccurring themes touching upon **effectiveness** and **efficiency**. With regards to efficiency, and a point not captured in earlier SEU analysis, was the use of time. Three evaluations cited cases where timelines were not realistic for achieving the stated expected results.

## Evaluations included in this report:

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| BATBE  | TB in Bagdad, Iraq  |
| BEIRA  | Advanced HIV Care in Beira, Mozambique                            |
| CMSTR  | Construction of complex medical structures                        |
| RECON  | Reconstructive surgery in Gaza and Mosul                          |
| HEPKA  | Hepatitis C in Karachi, Pakistan                                  |
| HIVGU  | Prevention of Mother to Child HIV Transmission in Guinea          |
| HIVKII | Decentralized HIV Care in Kinshasa, DRC                           |
| KANAN  | Phase 1 of the Sexual Gender Based Violence project, Kananga, DRC |
| METAE  | Meta Evaluation of OCB evaluations                                |
| ESHOW  | School-based TB component of the Eshowe project, South Africa     |