2013 Update of the DFID Multilateral Aid Review

Response by UNESCO

Overall progress assessment

- UNESCO welcomes the 2013 update to the DFID Multilateral Aid Review (MAR), which validates the Organization's progress made across all four reform priorities identified in the 2011 baseline MAR. In this spirit, UNESCO is pleased with the summary of overall progress for UNESCO, which reads: "*UNESCO is making reasonable progress on both 'Contribution to Results' and 'Strategic and Performance Management'. It has improved its Results Based Management, focused more on its comparative advantage and made a step change in implementation of evaluation recommendations. The confidence of members and other UN organisations in UNESCO is increasing.*"

- The 2013 MAR update notes "reasonable/ green" progress made in three areas ('Contribution to results', 'Strategic and performance management', 'Cost and value consciousness') and "some/orange" progress in the remaining one area ('Transparency and accountability'). For two components, i.e.' Contribution to results' and 'Strategic and performance management' the MAR update has resulted in a better overall score for UNESCO. Where areas for improvements are highlighted, the Organization is committed to making further efforts and progress.

- The summary assessment on the component 'Cost and value consciousness' has not (yet) translated into an increase of UNESCO's rating, although reasonable progress is being attested. UNESCO believes that an increase in the rating in this category may well be considered, given UNESCO's large-scale efforts geared towards greater efficiencies and cost-effectiveness, including in response to recent financial constraints. UNESCO's budget evolution over ten years underlines the Organization's unabated efforts to do more with less. UNESCO's overhead rate has been steadily going down and is now at its lowest. The Organization is less top heavy than ten years ago, with a considerable decrease in positions at D1 and D2-levels. UNESCO further has stepped up its strict cost control measures in areas such as travel, consultancy fees, and others.

- In the fourth area, transparency, UNESCO's Executive Board has noted that UNESCO continues to improve its own transparency through various measures (190 EX/Decision 46). The Organization is committed to building further on its efforts in this regard by moving towards the adoption of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard, in close coordination and harmonization with other UN system organizations. By its early implementation of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) – as the first agency of the UN system -, the Organization

has already demonstrated that it can be a leader with regard to new transparency standards.

Methodology applied

- UNESCO is pleased to note that the 2013 MAR update relies on a revised methodological approach, compared to the 2011 baseline MAR. The 2013 MAR update now takes into account to a fuller and more adequate extent the Organization's normative work – a dimension, which is of critical importance for UNESCO as a specialized agency. The 2013 MAR update recognizes the Organization's efforts articulating a theory of change "translating [UNESCO's] normative and standard-setting work into tangible change on the ground". UNESCO's normative work (e.g. relating to conventions, recommendations, declarations, as well as guidelines, toolkits, etc.) in the area of education, the sciences, culture, communication and information, has yielded significant impact in terms of increased awareness among, and capacities of, policy-makers at the country level. This has brought about changes in priority-setting and the quantity and quality of policies and legislation relating to normative instruments, with positive effects on the lives of beneficiaries at different levels in countries. UNESCO has stepped up its efforts to capture these effects through systematic monitoring and evaluation. The full recognition by the 2013 MAR update that normative work can translate into direct and tangible change for beneficiaries is a significant step forward in terms of adequately assessing the mandate, functions and business model of UNESCO as a specialized agency of the UN system.
- It is worth noting that the conceptual and methodological difficulties related to the assessment of results/impact of normative work are a challenge for the UN system as a whole and beyond, and are not limited to UNESCO only. In recognition of this – and as highlighted by the MAR update - UNESCO has played a leading role, in collaboration with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), in the development of a Handbook for the Evaluation of Normative Work. This tool will enable UN agencies with a strong normative orientation to better evaluate and report on the effects of their work.
- UNESCO furthermore appreciated the manner in which the 2013 update to the MAR was undertaken. The exercise was carried out in a more participatory manner, with opportunities for exchange and dialogue between members of the review team and UNESCO staff. During these exchanges, UNESCO was able to provide inputs to the MAR assessment framework, which resulted in an improved understanding of the Organization's mandate and performance from the perspective of the assessment framework. It is safe to assume that these exchanges had a positive effect on the quality and comprehensiveness of the data collected by the review team.

Way forward

- UNESCO appreciates exercises such as the DFID MAR, as they can serve to provide additional input into the Organization's ongoing reform processes led by the Director-General, geared towards sustainable change and more efficient and high-quality delivery on UNESCO's mandate, at the service of its Member States. The Organization is pleased that the MAR recognizes the continuing reform efforts in UNESCO. One of the most important drivers for reform has been the recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE), which UNESCO's Director-General and the UNESCO Executive Board translated into a cluster of 87 action points across various areas. The IEE action points are systematically followed up and many are already implemented. At the last session of the Executive Board, Member States acknowledged the considerable progress made by the Organization in implementing the main strategic directions provided by the IEE, in particular with respect to strengthening further UNESCO's participation in the United Nations system and to moving closer to the Field. Evaluation findings for the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa have informed the preparation of a detailed action plan. Following an initial review by the Executive Board, the Strategy is now in the process of being further revised.
- Achievements include: UNESCO has made progress in focusing the Organization's programmes, including through a recent budget prioritization exercise conducted by the Executive Board with the support of the Secretariat. The Organization has oriented its work more towards the Field, with reform and reinforcement of the Field Network in Africa moving towards completion. Strong progress has been made in defining the Organization's comparative advantage and added value in the context of UN system-wide action. UNESCO has assumed leadership roles within the CEB and its pillars in driving UN system reform efforts aiming at greater system-wide coherence, harmonization, effectiveness and high-quality results delivery in response to national priorities. UNESCO has adopted a new partnership strategy and is leveraging the contribution of its wide range of partners.

Final remark

- The Organization stands ready to engage further in the MAR exercise. Methodologically, UNESCO would be interested in receiving more information as to whether the updated ratings will be combined into an overall comparative picture of 'Value for Money' of all organizations under review. If yes, (a) what would be the exact method of aggregation permitting inter-institutional comparisons, and (b) would the overall picture include the other (original) criteria of the MAR 2011?