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UNESCO's Education Evaluations in 2016 – A Review

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ABSTRACT

UNESCO completed 12 education related evaluations in 2016. Part A of this review presents the key insights and lessons learned from those evaluations. These learnings are designed to help enhance UNESCO's leadership and coordination of the SDG 4 – Education 2030 Agenda. Part B of the review provides an assessment of the quality and usefulness of these evaluations based on the UNEG and OECD quality standards for evaluation reports.

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This review reflects the evaluative perspective of its author, and does not necessarily represent the views expressed by any individual of the above stakeholders.

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Executive Summary

Key messages from Part A

1. Part A of this report presents the key insights and learnings from 12 education evaluations completed in 2016. The report examines how the evaluations related to the Education 2030 Agenda (hereafter the Agenda), identifies issues affecting the Education Sector's work, draws out lessons learnt and key strategic considerations, and highlights UNESCO's key strengths, frameworks and approaches. The report only considers material presented in the 12 evaluations and only draws conclusions based on the reports. The review does not assess to which extent the 12 initiatives evaluated are representative of the work of the UNESCO Education Sector. Furthermore, the review does not consider actions and changes made following the evaluations.

2. It is to be noted that most of the projects and interventions that were subject to evaluation were conceived and implemented at a time when the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 - Education 2030 Agenda had not yet been adopted, and some interventions were rather relating to the previous Education for All (EFA) agenda. However, at the time when the evaluations were conducted, in the period 2015/16, linkages to the newly adopted SDG agenda and the respective targets within the thematic areas were sought and discussed in some of the evaluations. UNESCO, as one of the key agencies in the field of education, had been advocating and closely engaged in negotiating the education-related SDG targets, and hence many of these implicitly do closely correspond to the Organization's priorities. Some of the evaluations were not explicitly making reference to the linkages to the Agenda, however the assessment of the evaluations in this review is to be considered within this context of transition towards the Agenda becoming an explicit reference and shall help drawing lessons that are useful for UNESCO and its partners in its implementation.

3. The evaluations considered in the review show that UNESCO initiatives are most likely to make particular contributions to SDG Targets 4.5 (gender equality and equal access) and 4.7 (education for sustainable development). The programmes and projects evaluated during the period under review identified fewer contributions to Targets 4.2 (pre-primary education), 4.3 (technical, vocational and tertiary education), 4.4 (youth and adult skills) and 4.6 (youth and adult literacy). Importantly, two evaluations highlighted UNESCO's critical importance to developing the new Agenda and garnering widespread political and civil society support.

4. As mentioned before, it is critical that education evaluations conducted as of 2015 consider the new Agenda when developing intervention logics, drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations. A majority of evaluations indeed explicitly recognised the new Agenda. Some evaluations recommended changes to programmes to enhance their contribution to the new Agenda. There were, however, some missed opportunities to reflect on how the programmes or projects evaluated indeed contributed to the Agenda and how greater contributions could be made.

5. The evaluations identified a wide range of systemic issues internal to UNESCO that hindered the Education Sector's work: role clarity between Headquarters, national offices and regional bureaux; resourcing levels in the field; administrative and operational procedures; reporting, monitoring and evaluation practices; and knowledge management.

6. The key issues external to UNESCO that had an impact on the Education Sector's work were: national capacities; stagnating or declining education budgets; role clarity between partners; levels of engagement among partners; accountability mechanisms across UN agencies; and government processes.

7. Several lessons for UNESCO emerged from the evaluations: the need for appropriate staffing and resources for global coordination and consistent leadership; close involvement with stakeholders, particularly at the inception phases; flexible and decentralized approaches that facilitate design and implementation at the country level; investment in preparatory phases.

8. UNESCO faces several key strategic considerations: (1) ensuring continued political and commitment for the implementation of the Agenda in all countries; (2) deciding the focus of its work to be equally relevant to all countries' efforts in achieving the universal agenda while prioritizing those countries lagging behind in their operational work at country level; (3) influencing global funding mechanisms which tend to support only a few specific goals of the Agenda; (4) building the evidence base for what works in education; (5) harnessing UNESCO's global platforms for engaging with universities and foundations as increasingly generators of ideas; (6) striking the balance between decentralization and centralization of programmes as well as working with networks and partners in the face of resource constraints across UNESCO.

9. UNESCO has certain advantages as a multilateral organization. It can act as a neutral broker, mobilize resources at the political level and influence education strategies. UNESCO has particular strengths and expertise in secondary education, higher education, adult literacy, certification of non-formal education, skills for life and work. It is also widely recognized for its leadership in educational planning, statistics and teachers. Areas of future opportunity include disseminating good education practices; providing quality data on education in emergencies; and education management information systems.

10. UNESCO has a long established and strong position in education sector capacity building, youth and adult literacy, literacy and non-formal education, technical vocation education and training. The human rights based approach, quality education and equity perspectives, capacity development approaches, education for sustainable development and global citizenship education concepts all underpin UNESCO's work.

11. To fully harness UNESCO's networks, the evaluations identified the following: consistent and early engagement with partners; recognizing the importance of field presence as the crucial linking pin between national stakeholders and UNESCO; and, using open access platforms to improve sharing.

Key messages from Part B

12. The assessment of the quality of evaluation reports showed that most of them included good purpose and intention statements, described information sources, and contained clear and representative executive summaries.

13. Key areas for improvement included: systematically responding to recommendations in the evaluation reports; describing and assessing the intervention logic or theory; setting out lessons learned; explaining limitations in process, methodology and data; providing credible methodologies and strong evidence bases; and, integrating human rights and gender equality perspectives.

14. Corporate evaluations, i.e. evaluations that are managed or commissioned by IOS were in general of a higher quality than decentralised evaluations, i.e. those managed by the Education Sector or field offices. The main areas of difference were that, in general, IOS evaluations (i) contained better statements on the purpose and intent of the evaluation; (ii) provided more thorough assessments of the limitations of the evaluation; (iii) included management responses; and (iv) were systematically published and easily accessible.

About this review

15. IOS commissioned an external review of UNESCO's education-related evaluations completed in 2016. The review examined 12 such evaluation reports that were collected by IOS. This included four evaluations managed and/or conducted by IOS and eight evaluations managed by field offices or the Education Sector. Appendix A contains a full list of the evaluations.

16. The review had a dual purpose:

a. To provide lessons learned and insights to UNESCO as it leads and coordinates the SDG 4 - Education 2030 Agenda (discussed in Part A).

b. To provide an assessment of the quality and usefulness of evaluations in the field of education (discussed in Part B).

17. The review takes place at a time when the United Nations has mandated UNESCO to lead and coordinate the SDG 4 - Education 2030 Agenda (referred to as the Agenda in this report). SDG 4 seeks to "ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning". A set of ten targets aims to stimulate action and measure progress towards the goal (see Box at the end of this section).

18. The review examined 12 evaluations, all of which were completed in 2016, i.e. after the new Agenda came into being. It was therefore expected that all evaluation reports would at least acknowledge the new Agenda and consider the relationship between the initiative evaluated and the new Agenda. This includes discussion of how the contribution of an initiative to the new Agenda could be enhanced as well as specific contributions to the SDG targets.

19. While the programmes or projects evaluated were all conceived and designed prior to the conception of the new Agenda, it is assumed that, to varying degrees, their objectives are also relevant to the new Agenda. In other words, the starting presumption is that the new Agenda will not impose significant changes to the entire programming and conception of the Education Sector. Even more so, UNESCO, as one of the key agencies in the field of education, has been advocating and closely engaged in negotiating the Agenda, and hence many of its targets implicitly do closely correspond to the Organization's priorities. Some of the evaluations were not explicitly making reference to the linkages to the Agenda, however, the assessment of the evaluations in this review is to be considered within this context of transition towards the SDG 4 - Education 2030 agenda becoming an explicit reference. Consequently, it shall help drawing lessons that are potentially useful for UNESCO and its partners in implementing the new Agenda.

20. Some programmes and projects of which evaluations were included in this review were explicitly linked to the previous overarching framework – Education for All (EFA) – or were actually about UNESCO's leadership of the EFA movement, such as EFA coordination. The relevance of the findings and lessons learned from these evaluations to the new Agenda is for the ED sector to further consider. This report simply sets out the opportunities and issues identified in the 12 evaluations.

21. This review only considers the material and conclusions presented in the 12 evaluations reports. The 12 initiatives evaluated do not represent the work of UNESCO's Education Sector in its entirety. Evaluations from previous years have covered other education initiatives, but were not included in the scope of the present exercise. The report does not take into account actions and changes made since each evaluation. Nor does it consider broader institutional changes that may have taken place since.

SDG 4 Targets for Education

4.1
By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes

4.2
By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3
By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.4
By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5
By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6
By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7
By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.a
Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.b
By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

4.c
By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states

Part A – Insights for the 2030 Agenda

22. This section is divided into seven parts. Each is based on one of the seven specific questions of the review.

Question 1: How did the evaluations relate to the SDG4 targets?

23. A small majority of evaluations (seven of 12) acknowledged the Agenda as an umbrella strategy. A minority of evaluations (five of 12) showed how UNESCO's programmes contributed to the Agenda, mostly stating to which target the programmes had contributed.

24. The evaluations considered in the review show that those UNESCO initiatives are most likely to make particular contributions to Targets 4.5 (gender equality and equal access) and 4.7 (education for sustainable development). Few activities related to Targets 4.2 (pre-primary education), 4.3 (technical, vocational and tertiary education), 4.4 (youth and adult skills) and 4.6 (youth and adult literacy) were covered by the 12 evaluation reports examined for this exercise. Two evaluations highlighted UNESCO's critical importance to developing the new Agenda and garnering widespread political support for the new Agenda.

25. Equity and inclusion along with quality and learning were the themes of most relevance to the programmes evaluated. In many cases, the evaluations did not make specific links to the SDG targets, but the links can be inferred from the content of the evaluation. Four evaluations, i.e. only one third of those reviewed, did not make any explicit reference or mention of the Agenda.

26. The table below shows how each evaluation covered the Agenda and how the programme or project being evaluated contributed to the SDG 4 targets. Several evaluations were specifically designed to recommend, among other changes to programme design and implementation, improved alignment with the Agenda.

Evaluation	Contribution to Targets	How did the evaluations cover the Agenda?
UNESCO's Role in Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises	Education in emergencies is reflected specifically in Targets 4.5, 4.7 and 4a	Acknowledged the SDG4 targets and stated to which targets the programme contributed Recommended development of a strategy for education in emergencies and protracted crises in the context of UNESCO's leadership of the Agenda
UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet)	ASPnet particularly important for reaching Target 4.7	ASPnet recognized as an important mechanism for UNESCO in implementing the Agenda Recommended development of a strategy and plan of action and alignment with the framework of the Agenda
EFA Global and Regional Coordination Mechanisms	Coordination mechanisms potentially relevant for reaching all targets See note * below	Showed how the EFA Agenda influenced the SDG4 agenda. UNESCO garnered support among its partners to introduce otherwise neglected aspects of education in the global sustainable development agenda. Recommended several actions to strengthen UNESCO's coordination role of the Agenda
UNESCO's Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education	Contributes to Target 4.3	Acknowledged the relevance for Target 4.3
Field Crowd-sourcing Girls' Education	Potential contribution to Targets 4.1, 4.5 and 4.7 See note * below	Evaluation did not refer to the Agenda

UNDP/UNESCO/UNICEF Dialogue for the Future Project	Potential contribution to Target 4.7 See note * below	Recommended future interventions including follow-up to the project be well linked with the Agenda.
Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) – Building Momentum Towards 2014	Contributes to Target 4.7	Project being evaluated laid the foundation for the Agenda. This evaluation also highlighted UNESCO's critical work in laying the foundation for the Incheon Declaration and the new Agenda. UNESCO secured widespread political support.
Second Phase Literacy for Empowering Afghan Policy	Potential contribution to Target 4.6 See note * below	Evaluation did not refer to the Agenda
Fight Against Gender Inequality in Niger's Education System	Potential contribution to Targets 4.1 and 4.5 See note * below	Evaluation did not refer to the Agenda
UNESCO's Capacity Development for EFA Programme	Potentially contributes to all targets	Concluded that "the [then] current programme 2003-15 is explicitly and implicitly addressing the new features of the 2030 Framework such as (1) access, equity and inclusion; (2) quality and learning outcomes; (3) lifelong learning approach and system developments; (4) education in emergency situations." The aim of the evaluation was to take stock of achievements under the EFA period (2000-2015) and make recommendations on how the programme could be better aligned to the new Agenda and to identify how the future CapEFA programme(i.e. the new CapED programme) can best support the achievement of the Agenda
Retaining Girls in Lower Secondary Schools and Increasing their Learning Outcomes in Afar and Binishangul	Potential contribution to Targets 4.1 and 4.5 See note * below	Evaluation did not refer to the Agenda
Quality Teachers for EFA – Enhancing teacher education for bridging the education quality gap in Africa	Project's focus on teacher education and ICT enhancing learning material is particularly relevant to Targets 4a and 4c	Concluded that the project was relevant to the Agenda.

Notes:
* The evaluation did not make explicit the links to targets.

Question 2: What lessons learned did the evaluations identify that could be useful for UNESCO as it implements the new Agenda?

27. The evaluation of the JFIT-funded *Building Momentum Towards 2014* highlighted the critical role UNESCO played in laying the foundation for the Incheon Declaration and new Agenda. According to the evaluation, "UNESCO worked strategically to build momentum across key constituencies and drew on its field office network and National Commissions to gather support for the ESD agenda…".

28. UNESCO demonstrated strong leadership in shaping the new Agenda and was entrusted the global leadership and coordination of the Agenda. Fulfilling this role depends on **adequate staffing** of the coordination entity and consistent leadership based on a results-oriented coordination strategy. Unstable resourcing in the past negatively affected the efficiency of the coordination and reputation of UNESCO.

29. In coordinating at the global level, all partners need to agree and accept **accountability mechanisms**. Coordination meetings need a common objective and a clear and transparent system of representation.

30. Several evaluations identified that **close involvement of, and engagement with, stakeholders** throughout the process were important. This was particularly so during the design and conception phase. Involvement and engagement is needed to generate ownership, deliver effective programmes and sustain them. The evaluation of quality teachers for EFA in Africa identified that the **flexible approach** of the programme provided the basis for success. The approach was centred on each country being able to adjust the scope, objectives and approach of the project to its needs. The ASPnet evaluation found that the more **decentralized** and bottom-up approach contributed substantially to its relevance and successful implementation. It enables local actors to develop activities under an ASPnet banner that address the global educational and societal needs in a local/regional context. CapEFA programmes were found to be especially relevant when activities were closely linked to education sector reform or to national education sector plans.

31. A lesson from the evaluation of quality teachers for EFA in Africa is that projects were most successful when a substantial effort was made in the **preparatory phase**. This included time, budget and expertise. Success is often due to a committed project officer and enhanced by the presence of a UNESCO field office. Thorough and robust preparation improved implementation, made later changes to project planning easier, and improved the mobilization of national stakeholders.

32. One identified reason for the success of the CapEFA programme is its unique capacity development approach and its solid **monitoring and reporting** arrangements. The programme has deliberately improved them over the years by, for instance, including results matrices and yearly monitoring reports. This stands in contrast to other programmes and projects that demonstrated fewer results and had less well developed monitoring and evaluation frameworks. For instance, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the first generation of regional conventions on recognition of higher education qualifications were largely insufficient.

33. To deliver on the Agenda, UNESCO needs fruitful, effective and efficient cooperation with other convening agencies, UN organizations, and donor cooperation groups. The evaluation of the *Dialogue for the Future* project suggested that outcomes be organized around **joint results**, not the mandates of individual organizations. Examples of joint results are intercultural understanding, social cohesion and trust building. According to the evaluation, joint results would help create "common denominators" across agencies.

34. Many evaluations pointed to the need to improve **gender equality considerations** in programme conception, design and implementation. For instance, the evaluation of education in emergencies found that only half of interventions showed evidence of gender mainstreaming. The evaluation on the recognition of higher education qualifications found that information on the gender dimensions of recognition was scarce.

Question 3: What are the key strategic considerations for UNESCO as it leads and coordinates the SDG 4 – Education 2030 Agenda?

35. A key consideration facing UNESCO is how to ensure the widespread and continued political commitment for the implementation of the now holistic and universal global Agenda in all countries. In line with the EFA agenda, which was much more relevant to the developing world, the vast majority of the programmes evaluated were particularly focused on developing countries. One evaluation noted that EFA coordination initiatives were considered less relevant to middle or high-income countries,

while participation from these countries is essential for sharing learnings and experience, and building capacities.

36. A related strategic consideration is deciding the focus of UNESCO's work to ensure it is equally relevant to all countries' efforts in achieving the universal agenda, while at the same time **prioritizing actions for those countries lagging behind in their operational work** towards educational outcomes at country level. Striking the balance will be essential to delivering effectively on the Agenda.

37. Resource mobilization will continue to be critical to delivery of the Agenda. The focus of **global funding mechanisms** during the EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) period tended to be on primary education in developing countries. Now with a broader agenda, UNESCO in coordination with key partners needs to consider how it can best advocate for broadening funding priorities and seek new sources of funding for all targets of the Agenda.

38. A consistent theme from the evaluations was a **lack of baseline data and a missing evidence base for what works in education**. UNESCO-UIS has positioned itself for providing relevant data, indicators and statistics, but there remains a persistent gap in being able to provide reliable evidence that demonstrates the benefits and impact from various programmes and approaches on education systems, student learning outcomes, broader sustainability objectives and overall wellbeing. Furthermore, governments often lack capacity to generate, analyse and apply data on the status of their education systems. In this environment, UNESCO needs to make some strategic considerations as to how it will seek to contribute to build the evidence base with the support of UNESCO-UIS, national governments, data experts and other partners.

39. Several evaluations recommended the development of a strategy to guide UNESCO decision-making, focus resources, clarify roles and responsibilities, and demonstrate to partners the added value of UNESCO. The Organization will need to determine how much resources it invests upfront in **formulating strategies** versus hitting the ground running with project implementation. Investment in strategy development may have longer-term benefits, but more upfront costs in the short term as implementation resources may be diverted to strategy development.

40. One evaluation indicated that UNESCO's key role in acting as a laboratory of ideas risks being challenged as the research functions of universities and private foundations intensify. UNESCO therefore needs to make a strategic decision on how to position itself in its role of generating new ideas, especially on issues that may not be typically of interest to private foundations, versus making the best of new ideas generated elsewhere. It may be more cost-effective for UNESCO to focus on comparative and synthesis analyses of existing research with the explicit aim of influencing policy. Finally, UNESCO needs to consider how it can more effectively engage with the research community to influence their research agendas, promote knowledge exchange and disseminate new research findings.

41. Several evaluations concluded that UNESCO could most effectively respond if it is **resident in the country** and human financial resources are available for project implementation. Another related finding was that field office staff and national professional officers are critical "linking pins" between national stakeholders and UNESCO, responsible for day-to-day project implementation. In a resource-constrained environment, UNESCO cannot be present in every country. UNESCO will need to reconsider how it supports implementation in countries where it does not have a field office such as through antennas as in many CapED countries. Another option is to consider how to collaborate more effectively with other organizations with a country presence. One evaluation suggested that UNESCO delegate coordination responsibilities where partners have a strong in-country presence.

42. In any large multilateral organization, there is a tension between **decentralization and centralization**. More field office resources are likely to increase responsiveness and relevance of

programmes at the national level, but may lead to more fragmentation and a lack of coherence across the organization. More centralization may increase scale and depth of expertise for research and global strategy development, but a decrease in the autonomy of decentralized entities may make it difficult to respond to national and regional needs. Those evaluations that discussed this issue suggested that programmes with a more decentralized approach, emphasizing country ownership, devolved models and flexible implementation, were more effective. This suggests that UNESCO may need to consider favouring more decentralized approaches. In a similar vein, one evaluation suggested that Headquarters focus more on providing and mobilizing expert advice, rather than on administrative and monitoring support.

Question 4: What are the current areas of strength and future opportunities for UNESCO in education?

Current areas of strength

43. A common thread running through several evaluations was the legitimacy UNESCO has as a multilateral organization. UNESCO is the only UN organization to have a mandate for all education areas and is seen by partners to operate in an impartial and transparent manner. This puts UNESCO in a unique position to convene Member States, bring together a range of stakeholders, act as a neutral broker, mobilize at the political level and influence national education strategies. UNESCO's pivotal role in the Incheon Declaration and in shaping the education component of the Agenda illustrates this strength. UNESCO has put this into good effect; for instance, most countries' strategies have now integrated TVET, adult literacy and quality education and include targets based on the Agenda. The broker function also enables UNESCO to play an effective coordination role in regional and global education initiatives, including with national ministries of education.

44. UNESCO often works in areas left largely uncovered by other organizations working in education. These include secondary education, higher education, adult literacy, certification of non-formal education, skills for life and work. In some cases UNESCO is the only UN organization working in these areas. In the case of emergencies and protracted crises, UNESCO has developed particular expertise in crisis-sensitive educational planning, information management and capacity building for ministries of education. UNESCO is not well situated to provide immediate relief, but does assist with preparedness and reconstruction.

45. UNESCO has developed expertise in providing technical knowledge for developing policies, guidelines and tools for policymakers, teachers and students. UNESCO's intellectual leadership is recognised in planning (IIEP), teachers (Teacher Task Force) and statistics (UNESCO-UIS). UNESCO has particular expertise in developing capacities of stakeholders through its capacity development approach (discussed later in this report). Country evaluations of sector-wide policies and planning showed that UNESCO is the only organization capable of fostering horizontal and crosscutting approaches via CapEFA for developing consolidated policy frameworks at the country level. However, the evaluation of EFA coordination mechanisms reported that donor countries recognized far less the relevance and effectiveness of UNESCO publications, expressing a preference for those of the EU, OECD or the World Bank.

46. UNESCO has carved out a particular position in providing independent, authoritative and evidence-based monitoring data and statistics. The (former) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) was recognized as the most comprehensive statistical publication on the progress of national education systems in relation to the six EFA goals. It is likely that its replacement, the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report, will command a similar standing. The report has been translated into 12 languages and regional synthesis reports have been produced. The Decade on Education for Sustainable Development

(ESD) report significantly contributed to the evidence base for ESD and shaped the relevant global development agendas.

47. UNESCO has established several regional recognition conventions in higher education. It is the only UN agency with a mandate in higher education. The conventions constitute a unique legal framework allowing the recognition of qualifications in higher education between States Parties for academic and professional purposes. UNESCO can link the experiences of different regions and is able to convene stakeholders at global and regional levels.

48. As the only global school network, stakeholders considered the main benefit of ASPnet is in providing a common global platform and dissemination channel for translating UNESCO global values and principles of peace and human rights to the local context and transmitting it to the classroom. As a result, some ASPnet schools have enshrined UNSCO's values and principles in their missions. Teaching methodologies, contents and approaches of the schools also reflect these values.

Areas of opportunity

49. UNESCO had a specific role to play in ensuring EFA goals and education-related MDGs are reflected in documents of UN-wide planning processes: common country assessments, UNDAFs and poverty reduction strategy papers. Moving forward, UNESCO holds the mandate to lead and coordinate the Agenda, including as a focal point for education within the overall SDG coordination architecture and will thus have a significant role in ensuring the Agenda is reflected adequately in UN frameworks and documentation[1].

50. The **dissemination of good education practices** is a comparative advantage of UNESCO. Stakeholders reported that UNESCO should devote more attention to this. They noted that field practitioners and policymakers need more accurate and experience-based information. Several evaluations noted that there is a general need to demonstrate what works in education. UNESCO could fill this gap of demonstrating impact by building on its frameworks (refer Question 5 below) and data strengths.

51. **Quality data in the field of education in emergencies** is needed. At present, data is sparse and not comprehensive. There is very little information on the post-primary level and on the situation of refugee children and youth that are excluded from education. Stakeholders see UNESCO-UIS as well placed to fill these data gaps and develop specific indicators for education in emergencies. There is also an opportunity to provide capacity building to countries for the collection of related data and monitoring of progress towards the SDGs.

52. UNESCO also has an opportunity to make **education management information systems** a particular area of focus. It has provided technical support to strengthen country information systems, but there is a need to develop tools and standards in this area. Several evaluations alluded to the need to develop **indicator frameworks and tools** for measuring progress towards achievement of the SDG targets. UNESCO is well placed to develop indicator frameworks and tools[2].

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1 see Education 2030 Framework for Action : ….UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to continue its mandated role to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 agenda, in particular by: undertaking advocacy to sustain political commitment; facilitating policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and standard setting; monitoring progress towards the education targets; convening global, regional and national stakeholders to guide the implementation of the agenda; and functioning as a focal point for education within the overall SDG coordination architecture.

2 It is to be noted that since 2016 UNESCO has been engaging in several initiatives aiming at the development of such indicator frameworks and tools with the support of UNESCO-UIS, such as through the CapED programme.

Question 5: What are the capacities and frameworks that underpin UNESCO's education work?

Capacities

53. **UNESCO Category I institutes and centres** provide technical advice, build capacities, undertake research, and generate specialized literature and materials on particular education topics, in particular: **IIEP** for education sector planning and training; **UNESCO-UIS** for data and statistics; and to a lesser extent **UIL** for youth and adult literacy. Furthermore UNESCO's work in education is supported by a number of other partners and networks, such as UNESCO Chairs and Category II Institutes.

54. UNESCO has expertise and experience in **strengthening education systems** that bridge short and long-term needs. This includes capacity development of government officials, crisis-sensitive planning and information management. An example where UNESCO was "instrumental" in providing governments with online capacity development programmes and technical assistance aimed at strengthening national government capacities to conduct evidence-based research as well as to manage education outcomes (including quality, cost and governance). This was part of the Education Innovation Virtual Network (INNOVEMOS) in Latin America and the Caribbean.

55. UNESCO has specialist skills in **literacy and non-formal education** (NFE): these support the design of literacy and NFE strategies and programmes, and the conception of tools and products, such as guidebooks, modules, training materials and education manuals.

56. UNESCO has expertise in **technical and vocation education and training** (TVET): it supports the elaboration of national strategies and policies, as well as increasing the capacity for planning, monitoring and evaluation of TVET systems.

57. On the other hand, some evaluations noted that UNESCO lacked capacities in field offices to assist countries in operationalizing frameworks. Capacities to support programme implementation were, at times, also limited.

Frameworks

58. **Human rights-based approach to education**: a holistic approach, encompassing access to education, educational quality based on human rights values and the environment in which education is provided. UNESCO used the rights to education approach to convene partners around the theme "education as a means to reach all MDGs" and "no human development without education". The rights-based approach is reflected in various strategies, such as the *Education Sector Strategy on Standard Setting Instruments*. The Education Sector has also embedded the approach into various instruments. For example, the new generation of recognition conventions for higher education has further integrated human rights principles by adding articles requiring a fair assessment of knowledge and skills, prior learning and non-traditional modes of learning.

59. **Quality education and equity**: stakeholders in several of the evaluations suggested that UNESCO pay greater attention to issues of quality and equity. This includes advocating for inclusive education, mainstreaming gender equality as a crosscutting priority within national and regional education systems and strategies, and highlighting neglected areas such as early childhood care and education, adult literacy and other learning needs. Quality education and equity are not necessarily articulated in one specific framework, but they function as overall guiding principles for UNESCO's work. Some evaluations highlighted that UNESCO frames discussion around quality and equity within a **life-long learning** perspective. With this in mind, UNESCO often advocates for non-formal education, youth learning and adult literacy.

60. The **five-step capacity development approach** underpins the CapEFA programme. Stakeholders identified the framework as a distinct feature of UNESCO. The five steps cover: (1) stakeholder engagement, comprising advocacy, dialogue and consensus-building; (2) assessment of capacity assets and needs, which includes establishing a capacity baseline; (3) development of a response; (4) implementation of the response; (5) monitoring and evaluation of the capacity development. This approach seeks to contribute to a high-level endorsement and makes capacity development a central part of education-sector strategies.

61. A **participatory approach** is key to programme development and project implementation. In the case of CapEFA (now CapED) the participatory approach is twofold: externally, under the leadership of the field office it closely engages with national authorities and other development partners at the country level; internally, it involves different relevant entities of UNESCO (HQ, Regional Bureaux and Offices and Category I Institutes). The respective field office leads conception, planning and implementation of activities, with support from Headquarters and other relevant UNESCO entities, and in close cooperation and under the leadership of national authorities. Strong leadership at the national level ensures that activities closely respond to the particular needs and pace of the country. Other evaluations highlighted a participatory approach threaded through UNESCO's programming. For instance, the quality teaching for EFA initiative in Africa was underpinned by strong country participation and ownership.

62. **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD):** a global vision of providing everyone the opportunity to benefit from education and learning that facilitate social transition towards a sustainable future. ESD empowers learners with the values, competencies, skills and knowledge that are conducive to sustainable development. ESD promotes the ability to imagine future scenarios, reach decisions in a collaborative way, work towards a common goal, analyse complex information, self-motivate and take action, participate in decision making processes, and understand the situation, the outlook and the needs of people who belong to other cultural groups or who live in other parts of the world. ESD is an integral part of quality education and was critical to informing and developing the Agenda.

63. **Global Citizenship Education (GCED):** a framework that aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. UNESCO's approach to GCED is holistic, transformative, value-based and part of a larger commitment to support the quality and relevance of education.

Question 6: How can UNESCO fully harness its networks and partnerships towards attainment of the agenda?

64. The evaluations routinely emphasized the importance of UNESCO engaging in partnerships and using its networks to maximize its impact. UNESCO could make better use of its networks and partnerships by implementing the following points.

65. Several evaluations concluded that UNESCO needed **consistent engagement** with partners. For example, the evaluation on education in emergencies and protracted crises recommended UNESCO commit to relevant networks and education in emergencies partner mechanisms as the lead of the Agenda. Other evaluations noted that in-country presence was important in developing meaningful partnerships for formulating well-conceived proposals and delivering projects efficiently and effectively.

66. **Early engagement with partners** in the design and implementation phases is more likely to lead to success. This is because partners tend to represent users of the programme and therefore ensure that the concept and design of the programme meets needs. For example, CapEFA coordinators in the field of TVET tried to systematically include the private sector in the design or implementation of the

programme to improve relevance to the economic sector. The CapEFA evaluation also noted that the programme would benefit from strengthened cooperation between donors at early stages.

67. **Field Office staff and National Project Officers are the crucial "linking pin"** to national stakeholders, responsible for day-to-day project implementation. The evaluation of quality teachers for EFA in Africa found that countries that did not have dedicated field staff made little progress in implementation. An effective field staff is able "to build sustainable connections among national stakeholders".

68. **Open access platforms** can improve sharing across UNESCO, between, and with partners and beneficiaries. Platforms can share deliverables from projects and lessons learnt. They can also provide a forum for partners to discuss questions and issues. One evaluation found that on-line collaborative platforms are cost-effective for promoting sharing, learning and collaboration. They are also effective for dissemination. Stakeholders identified that new outlets, such as Twitter, webinars and Massive Open Online Courses, for knowledge generation and dissemination are important but underutilized.

69. **ASPnet** can play a vital role in helping UNESCO deliver on the Agenda, but its management requires some reform. The evaluation of ASPnet identified that the network's initiatives were most sustainable in two instances. First, when institutions were committed, such as through a **whole-of-school approach**. Second, when partnerships, such as with private firms or civil society, were established in the **local community**. UNESCO could better harness ASPnet by making more use of (i) on-line global platforms as they improved learning and exchange among schools, teachers and students across countries and regions; (ii) flagships with a regional focus such as the Slave Trade Route, Baltic Sea project and Blue Danube; (iii) projects that refer directly to UN topics. UNESCO also needs to ensure that ASPnet interventions are distinct from activities from other initiatives, such as greening schools.

70. More **south-south cooperation** can improve outcomes. One evaluation noted that UNESCO could do more to foster south-south cooperation, which can be very cost-effective as the partners commit resources.

Question 7: What systemic issues that constrain or enable UNESCO's work did the evaluations identify?

71. The evaluations identified a wide range of systemic issues **constraining** UNESCO's work and a much smaller set that enable UNESCO's work. This review takes "systemic issues" to be those that relate to organization-wide programming, processes and procedures. The evaluations did not typically label the issues as being "systemic" or specifically state that the issue affected UNESCO as a whole. In some cases, the evaluations found issues specific to the project, which serve to illustrate wider systemic issues about the way in which UNESCO conceives and delivers projects. These are also included in the analysis.

72. The most common set of constraining issues identified related to role clarity within **UNESCO's field network, and poor coordination and communication within UNESCO**. Four evaluations found that roles of regional bureaux and/or country field offices are not well defined or operationalized. For instance, the evaluation of EFA coordination mechanisms found that there was not a clear division of in-house coordination tasks and responsibilities between UNESCO regional and national offices. Several evaluations also identified weak coordination between UNESCO country offices and regional bureaux, and poor communication between Headquarters and the field network. There is also a lack of clarity as to which activities Headquarters coordinates.

73. Several evaluations highlighted aspects of **resourcing**, in particular **resourcing in field offices** as constraining UNESCO's work. One evaluation noted that field offices lack human resources to carry out the designated responsibilities. Another identified differences in staffing across regional bureaux as

inhibiting effectiveness of programme delivery. On the other hand, several evaluations noted that project implementation was much more successful when UNESCO had a field office in the country. An evaluation of a project with implementation in eight countries found that locations with committed, competent and well-connected field staff had better results. Aside from country-level resources, one issue identified was that changes in leadership and varying levels of resourcing over time for particular programmes had a negative effect. The uneven allocation of human and financial resources over the years to EFA coordination was also identified as a challenge.

74. Many evaluations identified lengthy and complex **administrative or operational procedures** as constraining UNESCO's work. No evaluation particularly highlighted any enabling administrative processes or procedures. Two evaluations stated that the slow release of funds due to validation processes slowed project implementation. Another found that the slow recruitment process had affected delivery. One evaluation concluded that the "excessive length and centralization of UNESCO procedure slowed down programme implementation and demotivated local actors". The evaluation of UNESCO's role in emergencies and protracted crises found that UNESCO had many "inadequate and out-dated guidelines" such as no criteria for decision-making, no mechanisms for rapid deployment, no roster and no emergency funds. Another evaluation found that the lack of "operational frameworks" impeded the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. One evaluation concluded that UNESCO's administrative frameworks and capacities are not equipped to handle large procurement activities as structures and mechanisms are not in place for their smooth processing. Finally, one evaluation suggested that UNESCO was not competitive because of its "contract modalities" and low rates for staff.

75. Some evaluations identified matters around inadequate **reporting and monitoring**. Timely and accurate monitoring and reporting data is essential to accountability and learning. Three evaluations highlighted that there was a lack of systematic reporting, monitoring and quality assurance. Two identified the need for better SMART performance indicators and benchmarks, including in the C/5 Programme and Budget.

76. The lack of systematic reporting leads to scattered representation of achievements, a lack of ability to aggregate and difficulty in creating an evidence base. Several evaluations noted that the lack of an **evidence base** – in particular for impacts of particular policies, programmes or projects – affected the ability of UNESCO to advocate and fundraise. For instance, the evaluation of quality teachers for EFA in Africa concluded that there was insufficient evidence of impact which is needed to convince stakeholders and donors to continue the approach. One evaluation noted the lack of transparency of project outputs, specifically a lack of public access to studies commissioned by UNESCO. Failure to release such documents inhibits learning and thus the building of an evidence base. It also dilutes incentives to produce quality outputs.

77. Two evaluations highlighted that UNESCO does not have effective **knowledge management**. One identified the absence of knowledge sharing networks and portals affecting efficiencies and learning. Another concluded that knowledge sharing was "limited" within the UNESCO family and that the Organization had no resource centre that could "capitalize" on learning.

78. The evaluations also identified the following that *may* indicate broader systemic issues:

- The lack of frameworks for scaling up initiatives and strategies for sustaining results was noted as an issue by several evaluations.
- Finding the right balance and distribution of roles between HQ and the field. One evaluation noted that the role of Headquarters in project implementation was limited to procedural and administrative aspects of project implementation, rather than providing substantive guidance and advice for implementation. Other evaluations, however, pointed to a lack of

decentralisation within the Organization with many initiatives being managed directly from Headquarters.

- The need for more systematic and structured intra- and cross-sector cooperation in particular with a view to the cross-sectoral and holistic vision of the SDG agenda was also highlighted by some evaluations.

79. With respect to **enabling factors**, the evaluations suggested that **clear coordination mechanisms** between UNESCO and its networks and partners, as well as an unambiguous division of tasks, led to success. As leader and coordinator of the EFA movement and the Agenda, UNESCO is entrusted to establish these mechanisms. Several evaluations emphasized that **country ownership** of the initiative was critical to success. Furthermore, the effective use of **ICT and social media** had in some instances proven to lead to enhanced management and implementation. UNESCO's frameworks and approaches also establish critical enabling factors - these are discussed in question 5 above.

80. Many issues external to UNESCO also influence its work – the most important of which are listed below. By virtue of its mandate, UNESCO may be able to influence some of these, such as by strengthening capacities in national governments, or by advocating for investing in education. For others UNESCO may have to consider them as risks or constraints and choose the best response to avoid or mitigate.

- The **level of capacities** in UNESCO's stakeholders and partners, particularly at national level institutions such as line ministries. Four evaluations raised this. Relatedly, staff turnover in partner organizations and a lack of financial resources for national partners hindered successful implementation for several projects.
- Stagnating or decreasing **budgets for education** at the national level.
- Lack of **role clarity between partners**, for instance between EFA partners and convening agencies at global, regional and country levels.
- Varying **levels of engagement** among partner organisations, including low levels of national commitment.
- A lack of well-defined **accountability mechanisms across UN agencies.**
- Political and **governance structures** of a country and the state of national infrastructure.
- **Government processes**: financial management regulations and procedures; complicated and cumbersome administrative procedures for project management and procurement.
- Focus on reaching **outputs, not results**, among some partners.

Way Forward

81. The following points from the evaluations reviewed aim to guide the future work of the Education Sector:

- In the context of the new Agenda, UNESCO needs to clearly position itself by developing specific strategies for its work in education sub-sectors. These should clarify roles and responsibilities within the Organization, but also demonstrate its added value to partners.
- In addition to its already established areas of expertise, UNESCO should strengthen its work in the provision of quality education data, especially in the field of education in emergencies, as well as the dissemination of this data and of good practices. It should also focus on the development of education management information systems and of indicator frameworks and tools that will allow for the tracking of progress towards the attainment of the Agenda.

- In coordination with key partners, UNESCO needs to advocate for the broadening of funding priorities and seek new sources of funding that cover all targets of the new Agenda.
- In order to be more relevant, effective and efficient in its in-country response, UNESCO needs to encourage decentralization and emphasize country ownership through its education programme staff in field offices for both implementation and monitoring.
- At the same time, the Education Sector at Headquarters should focus more on providing expert advice, research and global strategy development.
- In countries where UNESCO is not resident, it needs to develop effective cooperation mechanisms with other organizations that have country presence.
- UNESCO needs to review its administrative procedures in order to enable for more efficient programme delivery.
- Monitoring and reporting mechanisms also need to be reviewed in order to provide for accurate data that is essential for both accountability and learning.

82. The above points feature in recommendations in a number of evaluation reports assessed for this exercise. The IOS Evaluation Office regularly monitors the implementation of these recommendations and reports on progress to UNESCO's Governing Bodies.

Part B – Assessment of evaluations

83. This section provides a quality assessment of the 12 evaluations. The criteria for the assessment are drawn from UNEG and OECD quality standards for evaluation reports.3 Each evaluation was given a score from 0 to 5 for each criterion. A score of zero means the evaluation did not meet the criterion in any way; five means the evaluation fully met the criterion.

84. The table below shows the scores for all 12 evaluations combined the set of corporate (IOS managed/conducted) evaluations and decentralised (i.e. those managed by Education Sector and field offices).4 Appendix B contains the detailed scores for each evaluation.

Criterion	Average score of evaluations		
	corporate	decentralized	All
1. The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality are integrated in the report [UNEG]	2.8	2.4	2.5
2. Rationale, purpose and intent are clearly stated (should be a clear intention to use the evaluation analysis, conclusions and recommendations to inform decisions and actions) [OECD and UNEG]	5	3.3	3.8
3. The selected methodology answers the evaluation questions using credible evidence and a clear distinction is made between the different result levels. The methodology must lead to a complete, fair and unbiased assessment [OECD and UNEG]	2.4	2.3	2.3
4. The evaluation report can readily be understood by the intended audience(s) and the form of the report is appropriate [OECD]	2.8	3.3	3.1
5a. A clear and representative executive summary [OECD and UNEG]	4	2.8	3.2
5b. A description of the context of the intervention [OECD]	3.3	3.1	3.2
5c. A description and assessment of the intervention logic or theory [OECD]	1.5	0.9	1.1
5d. A description of the sources of information used in sufficient detail, including complete lists of interviewees and other information sources consulted [OECD]	5	2.9	3.6
5e. A description and explanation of the methodology and its application. In assessing outcomes and impacts, attribution/contribution to the results are explained [OECD and UNEG]5	2.8	2.5	2.6
5f. What was found and on what evidence base [OECD and UNEG]	2.5	2.5	2.5
5g. What was concluded from the findings in relation to main evaluation questions and how such conclusions were drawn [OECD and UNEG]	3	2.3	2.5
5h. What was recommended [OECD and UNEG]	2.8	2.9	2.8
5i. What could be learned from the evaluation if anything [OECD and UNEG]	1.3	1.5	1.4
6. Recommendations are firmly based on evidence and analysis, clear, results-oriented and realistic in terms of implementation [UNEG]	2.5	2.5	2.5
7. The evaluation report answers all the questions in the terms of reference [OECD]	3	1.6*	2.1
8. The report explains any limitations in process, methodology or data, and discusses validity and reliability [OECD and UNEG]	3.5	0.9	1.8
9. Recommendations are systematically responded to in the report [OECD and UNEG]	3	0	1
10. The evaluation results are presented in an accessible format and systematically distributed internally and externally for learning and follow-up [OECD and UNEG]	5	1.4	2.6

* Four of the evaluations did not provide Terms of Reference or a list of questions. These evaluations received a score of zero. If these evaluations are excluded, the average score would be 3.3.

3 http://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf. http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914.
4 see detailed definitions for corporate and decentralised evaluations in the UNESCO Evaluation Policy (http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/IOS/images/UNESCO_Evaluation_Policy_EN.pdf
5 this criterion may apply to only a limited extent as evaluations at UNESCO do not necessarily have the means to conduct fully-fledged impact assessments.

Overall strengths

85. The assessment identified particular strengths of the evaluations as a set. These strengths were particularly noticeable for evaluations managed or conducted by IOS, but also for several managed by field offices/sectors.

Purpose and intention statements

86. It is important that the rationale, purpose and intent of the evaluation be clearly stated. This indicates that the evaluation has a specific need, will be useful and relevant, and will inform decisions and actions. All four IOS evaluations contained very clear purpose and intention statements, as did most field/sector evaluations. Three evaluations scored below three: in one case, the purpose was not clear; in another the statement was hidden in an annex; and another did not contain any purpose statement anywhere in the document.

Description of sources of information

87. The credibility of evaluations rests partly on adequate and appropriate information and data sources. Triangulation principles rest on the use of multiple sources of data and methods to validate findings. Clearly describing information sources is thus critical to delivering high quality, trusted reports. Reports should include full lists of interviewees, complete lists of documents consulted and all other information sources. All four IOS evaluations received a full score, while only three field/sector evaluations scored below three.

Clear and representative executive summaries

88. An executive summary provides an overview of the report, highlighting the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and any overall lessons. The summary should be short and succinct. IOS evaluations received an average score of four out of five. The IOS summaries were very representative and in general clear. In some cases, the summary could have been shorter and more succinct. The summaries of most sector/field evaluations were adequate, although one evaluation did not contain a summary, another missed some key points and two did not contain any information on the recommendations.

Key areas for improvement

89. The assessment identified a range of weaknesses in the reports. Some of these can be easily addressed, such as ensuring systematic responses to evaluations are included in the reports, explaining limitations, and describing and assessing the intervention logic or theory. Others are more challenging to address, such as ensuring the evaluation report answers all the questions in the terms of reference[6], drawing out lessons learned, or improving the methodological basis and evidence for findings and conclusions.

Systematic responses to recommendations

90. Evaluation standards require that systematic responses to evaluations. This takes the form of a formal management response, attached to the evaluation report. The response should include an overall response to the evaluation and set out whether and why management agrees or disagrees with

[6] this also requires considerations to what extent the Terms of Reference are realistic and feasible within the given time and resource framework for an evaluation.

each recommendation. It should also contain the concrete actions management intends to take. The actions should be concrete, objectively verifiable, time-bound and clear on responsibilities.

91. None of the sector/field evaluations contained a management response. All IOS evaluations contained a management response with clear statements on whether management agreed or disagreed. However, none of the actions were time-bound, with the risk that implementation will not occur, despite good intentions.[7]

Descriptions and assessments of the intervention logic or theory

92. Evaluation reports should describe and assess the intervention logic or theory, including underlying assumptions and factors affecting the success of the intervention. A good theory of change should methodically step through each part of the result chain, specifying assumptions and making clear statements on which actors are responsible for delivering the particular result. The intervention logic or theory of change identifies the precise links between activities and the achievement of the long-term goals. This leads to better evaluation, as it is possible to measure progress towards the achievement of goals and to identify where in the results chain problems, obstacles or gaps are occurring.

93. Only four of the 12 evaluations contained a theory of change and another contained an attempt at a theory of change, but confusingly mixed the theory with evaluative conclusions. Of the logics presented, most stated the assumptions made, although it was not always clear at which stage of the process these assumptions applied. The logic models were not clear on who was involved in generating the result. Determining who is necessary to realize an output or outcome is particularly important for pinpointing the role of UNESCO versus its stakeholders. Finally, the logic models tended to contain leaps between intermediate outcomes and final impacts. For instance, it is not clear why harmonization of policies brings about more financial resources, or which steps are required so that regional strategies will increase political commitment. Many UNESCO projects and programmes operate in a complex environment and multiple outcome chains, each with underlying assumptions, may be required to demonstrate the generation of the final impacts.

Lessons learned

94. Identifying lessons learned is important for maximizing the value obtained from evaluations. The lessons can often be applied to many contexts in different organizations, in different geographical settings and across multiple interventions.

95. Close examination of the reports showed that the majority of evaluations contained several lessons learnt – the most important of which are summarized in Section A. However, these were rarely pulled together into specific sections on lessons learned, nor were they adequately explained. Brief discussions on what the lessons might mean for UNESCO or the broader education programme were mostly missing.

Limitations in process, methodology or data

96. Evaluators confront various limitations in any evaluations. These may be brought about by limitations in data availability and quality, sampling, and available or applicable methodologies. Limited resources and frameworks for evaluations can be limiting factors. Practicalities in conducting the evaluation may also result in limitations on the validity and reliability of data and conclusions drawn.

[7] more detailed actions plans, including concrete and time bound actions have been developed for all corporate and several decentralised evaluations, however these are usually not attached to the evaluation reports.

Evaluation reports need to explain all such limitations and what implications these have on the evaluation's findings and conclusions.

97. In general, the IOS evaluations adequately set out the limitations. All but one of the sector/field evaluations, on the other hand, contained little or no discussion of limitations. No evaluations were able to construct a counterfactual[8], but this limitation was not explicitly discussed.

Not all evaluation questions answered

98. Evaluation reports should answer all the questions contained in the terms of reference for the evaluation. Where this is not possible, explanations are to be provided, or covered in the limitations.

99. Four evaluations (all sector/field office evaluations) did not provide a list of the evaluation questions. This is problematic and indicates that this evaluation standard was not understood. Of those that contained the questions, there was mixed success in answering them. No evaluation report explained why certain questions could not be answered. Two of the four IOS evaluations were unable to answer a significant number of questions. This suggests either that the questions of the Terms of Reference were too ambitious, or that resources, methodology or data were more limiting than had been expected.

Credible methodology and strong evidence base

100. Quality evaluations should provide credible and useful evidence to strengthen accountability and contribute to learning processes. The methodology should primarily be selected with this in mind. It is also important that a clear distinction be made between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. This helps in developing a theory of change and drawing conclusions, particularly related to effectiveness and impact.

101. Both IOS and sector/field evaluations showed deficiencies in this area. In general, the evaluation of UNESCO initiatives is not straightforward given the difficulties in constructing theories of change, counterfactuals, data limitations and lack of comparable cases. The methodology of UNESCO evaluations is mostly limited to reconstructing or refining a theory based intervention logic, interviews, surveys and document review. No evaluations in the sample made use of semantic tools for analysing documents or media coverage. Few evaluations analysed citation or use metrics for UNESCO publications.

102. The gold standard for evaluation methodology is randomized control trials (RCT). These are difficult to employ in development contexts, and bear a significant cost, that goes beyond evaluation resources currently available at UNESCO. However, for instance, RCTs could be used when designing programmes that target particular schools in certain regions. This would require an evaluation framework to be built into the policy/project design at its inception. However, most of UNESCO's interventions typically target the policy level, where this is less easily applicable.

Clear and evidence-based recommendations

103. Recommendations need to be firmly based on evidence and analysis, clear, results-oriented and realistic in terms of implementation. There are opportunities to strengthen recommendations in all the evaluations assessed.

[8] UNESCO's interventions are taking place in a rather complex multi-stakeholder environment and establishing a counterfactual would - apart from requiring significant resources - also be limited by ethical constraints.

104. The majority of recommendations were clear, but many were not based on firm evidence. In some instances, recommendations were detached from the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. Some were not particularly realistic to implement in the current context of the Organization, especially those calling for UNESCO to allocate more resources – either financial or staff – to a particular initiative. In a resource-constrained environment, such recommendations are not particularly useful, nor are they robust. A recommendation for increased funding requires analysis of alternative uses of the funds or alternative ways of raising additional funds. It is very challenging for one evaluation to assess all other major uses of resources. Recommendations on improving design and implementation are likely to be more useful than those calling for more resourcing.

Integration of human rights and gender equality

105. The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality need to be integrated into all stages of an evaluation. The evaluation approach and methods of data collection and analysis should incorporate a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach. Evaluation data should be disaggregated by social criteria, such as sex, ethnicity, age, disability, geographic location, income or education.

106. Several of the initiatives evaluated specifically targeted gender equality issues. Around half of the evaluations showed a strong understanding of gender equality, with several containing specific recommendations around improving gender equality dimensions. However, most evaluations did not integrate human rights principles into the report. Most evaluations did not mention human rights principles or integrate data disaggregation into the methodology.

Way Forward

107. A number of reviews have shown that the quality of evaluation practices varies greatly throughout the Organization. Consequently, the IOS Evaluation Office recently established an Evaluation Focal Point Network that aims at strengthening evaluation capacities through the provision of training, guidance, tools and the establishment of a community of practice. The training programme for staff across the Organization is being rolled out throughout 2017.

108. Future synthetic reviews of UNESCO evaluations shall focus on longer periods, spanning entire biennia, in order to cover larger numbers of evaluations and of multiple programme sectors. As such, they will be able to feed into the Organization's Strategic Results Reports.

Appendix A: List of evaluations

IOS evaluations

Evaluation of UNESCO's Role in Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises IOS/EVS/PI/157.REV2, October 2016 (Evaluation #1)

Evaluation of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) IOS/EVS/PI/152, July 2016 (Evaluation #2)

Evaluation of the Education for All (EFA) Global and Regional Coordination Mechanisms IOS/EVS/PI/150, June 2016 (Evaluation #3)

Evaluation of UNESCO's Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education IOS/EVS/PI/149, June 2016 (Evaluation #4)

Field office and Education Sector evaluations

Crowd-sourcing Girls' Education: A community-based approach to lowering drop-out rates in secondary schools in Tanzania (Evaluation #5)

Evaluation of UNDP/UNESCO/UNICEF Dialogue for the Future (DFF) Project (Evaluation #6)

Evaluation of UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust (CIT) Project: Quality Teachers for EFA – Enhancing teacher education for bridging the education quality gap in Africa (Evaluation #7)

Education for Sustainable Development – Building Momentum Towards 2014 (Evaluation #8)

Project Evaluation of the Second Phase Literacy for Empowering Afghan Policy (Leap2) (Evaluation #9)

Project Evaluation of the Fight against Gender Inequality in Niger's Education System (Evaluation #10)

Evaluation of UNESCO's Capacity Development for Education for All (CapEFA) Programme (Evaluation #11)

Retaining Girls in Lower Secondary Schools and Increasing their Learning Outcomes in Afar and Binishangul Gumuz Regional States, Ethiopia (Evaluation #12)

Appendix B: Quality assessment of evaluations

Criterion	Evaluation											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality are integrated in the report [UNEG]	4	1	2	4	5	2	2	1	1	3	2	3
2. Rationale, purpose and intent are clearly stated (should be a clear intention to use the evaluation analysis, conclusions and recommendations to inform decisions and actions) [OECD and UNEG]	5	5	5	5	0	2	5	5	2	4	5	3
3. The selected methodology answers the evaluation questions using credible evidence and a clear distinction is made between the different result levels. The methodology must lead to a complete, fair and unbiased assessment [OECD and UNEG]	3	3	1	2	1	2	4	3	1	1	4	2
4. The evaluation report can readily be understood by the intended audience(s) and the form of the report is appropriate [OECD]	4	2	2	3	3	2	5	5	2	3	4	3
5a. A clear and representative executive summary [OECD and UNEG]	5	4	4	3	3	2	4	5	0	2	4	2
5b. A description of the context of the intervention [OECD]	5	2	2	4	2	4	3	4	3	1	5	3
5c. A description and assessment of the intervention logic or theory [OECD]	0	3	3	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	3	0
5d. A description of the sources of information used in sufficient detail, including complete lists of interviewees and other information sources consulted [OECD]	5	5	5	5	1	4	0	5	5	3	3	2
5e. A description and explanation of the methodology and its application. In assessing outcomes and impacts, attribution/contribution to the results are explained [OECD and UNEG]	3	3	2	3	1	2	4	3	2	2	4	2
5f. What was found and on what evidence base [OECD and UNEG]	3	3	2	2	2	2	4	3	2	1	4	2
5g. What was concluded from the findings in relation to main evaluation questions and how such conclusions were drawn [OECD and UNEG]	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	2	0*	2	4	2
5h. What was recommended [OECD and UNEG]	3	3	2	3	1	3	4	4	3	2	4	2
5i. What could be learned from the evaluation if anything [OECD and UNEG]	0	0	2	3	0	3	2	1	0	1	3	2
6. Recommendations are firmly based on evidence and analysis, clear, results-oriented and realistic in terms of implementation [UNEG]	3	3	2	2	1	2	4	3	3	2	3	2
7. The evaluation report answers all the questions in the terms of reference [OECD]	4	2	3	4	0*	0*	0*	3	0*	2	4	4
8. The report explains any limitations in process, methodology or data, and discusses validity and reliability [OECD and UNEG]	2	4	4	4	0	1	0	0	1	0	5	0
9. Recommendations are systematically responded to [OECD and UNEG]	3	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. The evaluation results are presented in an accessible format and systematically distributed internally and externally for learning and follow-up [OECD and UNEG]	5	5	5	5	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	4
TOTAL out of a maximum score of 90 points	**60**	**54**	**51**	**59**	**22**	**35**	**49**	**48**	**26**	**32**	**61**	**38**

* Terms of Reference not reproduced in evaluation report. The Terms of Reference for evaluation 6 did not contain questions. Evaluation questions not discussed for evaluation 9.