



United Nations Development Programme

DP/FPA/2020/CRP.1

Distr.: General
6 December 2019

Original: English

First regular session 2020
3 to 6 February 2020, New York
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
UNFPA – Evaluation

United Nations Population Fund

Developmental evaluation of results-based management at UNFPA

Summary

In 2019, the Evaluation Office conducted a developmental evaluation of results-based management (RBM) as part of the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan (2018-2021). This is the first developmental evaluation conducted at UNFPA.

The main purpose of this evaluation was to provide useful real-time evaluative input for decision-making and learning in order to develop the next stage of RBM. This evaluative input involved identifying progress and challenges in RBM and providing evidence for solutions and courses of action in the area of RBM.

I. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

1. The primary purpose of this developmental evaluation of results-based management (RBM) was to provide useful real-time evaluative input for decision-making in order to develop the next stage of RBM. This evaluative input included two main streams: identifying progress and challenges in RBM; and providing evidence to inform solutions and courses of action in the area of RBM. The evaluation put in place a data-driven evaluative process that has informed the analytical framing and decision-making process associated with organizational efforts to bring RBM to a new stage of development. The evaluation has provided initial input to the organizational development process required to advance UNFPA towards this new stage.

2. The scope of this centralized evaluation included all components and dimensions of RBM. The evaluation process engaged business units across all levels in the agency, and the analysis covered the country, regional and global levels. In addition, it also looked at specific aspects of RBM in the United Nations development system and the broad development cooperation sector.

II. What is a developmental evaluation, and why is UNFPA conducting one?

3. An external independent strategic review of the UNFPA evaluation function was carried out during 2017-2018 and presented to the Executive Board at the 2018 annual session. The external review recommended that the Evaluation Office guide the UNFPA evaluation function towards a better balance between accountability and learning purposes, and continuously adapt its evaluation approaches and processes to best inform and support the attainment of the UNFPA mission in rapidly changing and challenging contexts, including by better integrating relevant developments in the theory and practice of evaluation.¹

4. Responding to the recommendations of external review, the UNFPA Evaluation Office in 2018 developed and rolled out the Evaluation Strategy (2018-2021).² The strategy included, among others, the following two priorities:

- (a) Demand-driven evaluation function processes and products: The evaluation function seeks to strike a strategic balance between supply-side evaluation approaches and more responsive, demand-driven ones, to better integrate accountability and learning.
- (b) Diversification and innovation of evaluation processes and products: From a demand-driven perspective and respecting the principle of “no one size fits all,” evaluation processes and products are diversified, innovative, responsive and relevant to stakeholder needs and requirements.

5. The UNFPA Evaluation Office, responding to a specific demand by senior management, and in alignment to the above-mentioned Evaluation Strategy (2018-2021), decided to undertake – for the first time – a “developmental” evaluation.

6. Developmental evaluations help to identify innovative options in complex, uncertain and dynamic conditions associated with the development of a new initiative.³ This was the case with the explicit will of UNFPA to evolve to the next stage of RBM.

7. There were three main reasons why a developmental evaluation was more suitable than a summative or formative evaluation. First, a developmental approach was a better fit, given the purpose of the exercise. Developmental evaluations contribute to initiatives that are being

¹ Annual report of the evaluation function 2017 (DP/FPA/2018/5), paragraphs 19b and 19c

² [UNFPA Evaluation Strategy](#) (2018-2021)

³ Michael Quinn Patton (2010), *Developmental Evaluation*, The Guilford Press

developed, and this concept was fully aligned with the purpose of the present exercise. Second, a developmental evaluation was more suited to the nature of RBM at UNFPA, which was the subject of the evaluation. RBM operates in a systemic fashion, and developmental evaluations are based on the application of systems thinking and complexity theory. Third, the focus on utilization was key. UNFPA was seeking a demand-driven exercise that provided useful, real-time evaluative input. Developmental evaluations are situated within the larger context of utilization-focused evaluations; these are evaluations that focus on achieving “intended use for intended users”.⁴

III. Results-based management at UNFPA

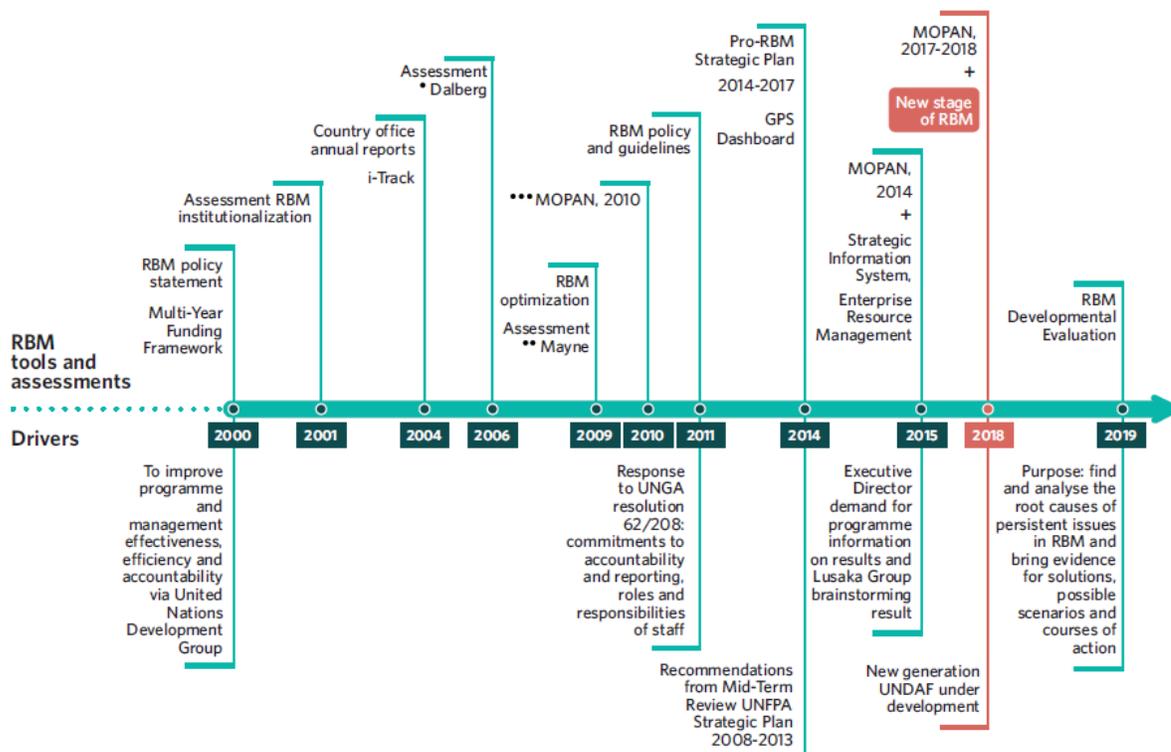
8. According to the *United Nations Development Group RBM Handbook*,⁵ adhered to by UNFPA, RBM is a management strategy by which all actors, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of development results, ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results (outputs, outcomes and goals).

9. As shown in figure 1 below, RBM was initiated at UNFPA in 2000, with an RBM policy statement issued with the approval of the UNFPA multi-year funding framework (MYFF) 2000-2003. In 2004, UNFPA introduced results-oriented country office annual reports as the primary reporting tool associated with the MYFF, and launched the i-Track system, which allowed headquarters and country offices to complete their annual reports online. In 2011, UNFPA introduced its first results-based management policy. The policy was mainstreamed through the UNFPA strategic plans. The strategic plan for 2014-2017, for instance, incorporated an integrated results framework with management and development results.

⁴ Michael Quinn Patton (2008), *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, SAGE Publications, Inc.

⁵ United Nations Development Group. (2011). *Results-Based Management Handbook. Harmonizing RBM concepts and approaches for improved development results at country level*

Figure 1
Evolution of RBM at UNFPA



* Assessment commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conducted by Dalberg in 2006

** A diagnostic report on RBM challenges at UNFPA conducted in 2009 by John Mayne

*** MOPAN: Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network

10. The pace of development of RBM formal systems and frameworks since 2010 has been remarkable. In 2013, the UNFPA Programme Division (since renamed the Policy and Strategy Division) convened the Lusaka Group, a group of in-house monitoring and evaluation experts tasked with developing action plans to strengthen RBM in UNFPA. The remarkable progress in RBM was acknowledged by the 2014 Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) report, which highlighted the adoption of a robust integrated results framework, theories of change, and improved country-level monitoring and evaluation. The UNFPA strategic plan, 2014-2017, featured several new elements in RBM information systems infrastructure: the Global Programming System (GPS), implemented in 2014; the strategic information system (SIS)⁶; the enterprise risk management system (ERM), introduced in 2015; and an RBM dashboard, introduced in 2017.⁷ These new systems aimed at strengthening UNFPA performance in delivering development results as well as enhancing UNFPA accountability to donors for the utilization of funds.

⁶ The SIS is an overarching gateway for critical information about the profiles, performance and results of UNFPA departments.

⁷ A platform that pulls together selected data and analytics from various UNFPA data sources and makes them accessible in one place, sorted by business unit, region/division and for the entire UNFPA. It provides easy access to selected data and analytics for decision-making.

11. The current UNFPA strategic plan (2018-2021) underscores the relevance of mainstreaming RBM across UNFPA policies, procedures, manuals and systems. It commits to increasing efforts to improve RBM so that it becomes a core capacity of all staff, at both programme and operational levels.

12. Overall, the development and roll-out of RBM in UNFPA has been characterized by intentional and incremental improvements responsive to demands from the Executive Board and external assessments. However, despite the aforementioned efforts in improving RBM in terms of architecture, frameworks, systems and tools, a number of challenges and problems have persisted. These challenges tend to be systemic and are variously related to deeper structural aspects of organizational culture, diverse understanding of the RBM conceptual framework by different stakeholders, measurement challenges, and tensions between collective (at United Nations system level) and individual (at UNFPA level) accountabilities. This developmental evaluation is a direct result of the willingness of UNFPA to focus on the analysis of these persistent issues, their root causes and possible ways forward.

IV. Evaluation methodology

13. The evaluation’s scoping mission resulted in the identification of five “creative tensions” – the five main areas where gaps and challenges prevent the current RBM system from optimizing its performance. The evaluation inquiry framework was developed based on these five creative tensions. This framework guided data-collection and analysis processes. Evidence and findings were then shared through feedback loops and presentations to UNFPA business units across the organization, leading to the identification of a number of “leverage points” – areas of a system where small shifts can produce significant improvements. At the time of writing, six leverage points had been identified, and UNFPA was reflecting on how to address them. Several entry points had also been put forward for consideration by UNFPA.

14. Tools for primary data collection encompassed in-depth semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions; an online survey; and participant observation. The evaluation team conducted 144 interviews and 10 focus group discussions, with a total of 290 people consulted. Overall, 757 UNFPA staff, covering all UNFPA geographical regions and functional positions, responded to the online survey. Participant observation and on-site consultations were applied in three RBM workshops. Tools for secondary data collection encompassed the study of documentation and retrieval of information from existing datasets.

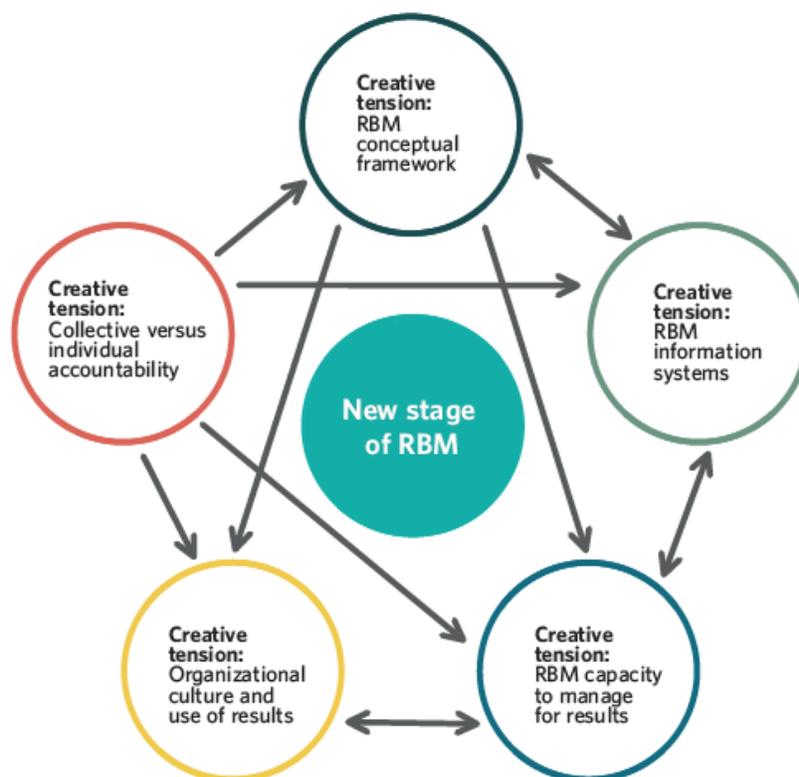
15. Tools for data analysis included: content analysis; systems analysis; comparative analysis; brief case study; and statistical analysis. The last of these included both basic statistical analysis (descriptive statistics) and inferential statistics, applied to the results of the survey.

V. What has the developmental evaluation led to so far?

16. The point of departure for the evaluation was the organizational diagnosis of the RBM system conducted during the evaluation’s scoping phase. This situational analysis of the issues, gaps and bottlenecks that prevented the existing RBM system from fully optimizing its performance was the first primary finding of the evaluation. The situational, systemic analysis is explained through a system of five interrelated creative tensions preventing and undermining the current RBM system from fully optimizing its performance.

17. A creative tension designates a gap between a desired goal or idea (the way it should be) and a current state of reality (the way it is). A creative tension, which may also show gaps between different perspectives, always focuses on a gap that seeks to be resolved and create solutions – that is why it is considered a “creative” tension.

Figure 2
The five results-based management creative tensions at UNFPA



18. The five creative tensions identified by the evaluation are as follows:
- The first creative tension (CT1) is about the RBM conceptual framework. The analysis revealed that there are diverging views and understandings of the concept and purpose of RBM by different stakeholders. Yet there is a clear organizational appetite and demand to co-create a shared vision and a conceptual and operational framework that could guide and foster the practice of a high-impact RBM approach.
 - The second creative tension (CT2), United Nations collective accountability versus UNFPA individual accountability, reflects two external drivers affecting the organization. One of the drivers is the move towards collective accountability advocated by the United Nations Secretary-General's reform agenda. This move entails joint RBM approaches in planning, measuring and reporting results. The other driver is the demand for individual UNFPA accountability (often requested by Member States), associated with clear attribution lines and high levels of granularity when reporting results.
 - The third creative tension (CT3) is centred on the organizational culture and use of results for decision-making. The analysis revealed that UNFPA has the vision and the mandate (reflected in the RBM policy) to foster a strong culture of results. It aims to do this by mainstreaming the use of results across all levels of the organization, directing such use towards organizational learning and adaptation. However, the current results culture is largely influenced by a focus on accountability for funding and reporting. This has unintended consequences in terms of fostering the use of results and the engagement and motivation of staff for learning.

- (d) The fourth creative tension (CT4) focuses on capacity to manage for results. The analysis pointed to a disparity between the expected and the actual ability of the current RBM procedures to allow effective management for results at all levels of the organization. In particular, a tension was identified between tools and procedures setting high normative standards and their practical implementation, which seemingly faced technical, conceptual and attitudinal gaps. At the same time, there were indications of a gap between country contexts and the ability of RBM tools and procedures to adapt and respond to such contexts.
- (e) The fifth creative tension (CT5) focuses on RBM information systems. The analysis revealed that, despite the fact that information systems are in place to plan, implement, monitor and report on results, they do not satisfy the current pressing demand for a single, integrated, real-time corporate information system that can also accommodate compatibility requirements with collective systems in the framework of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

19. These five creative tensions are all interrelated, influencing and affecting each other either directly or indirectly, thereby reflecting a systemic nature. The evaluation used this systemic diagnosis to find out the root causes beneath the symptoms (the five creative tensions) that prevent the RBM system from performing optimally. This systemic diagnosis was also the point of departure for the identification of leverage points for potential solutions.

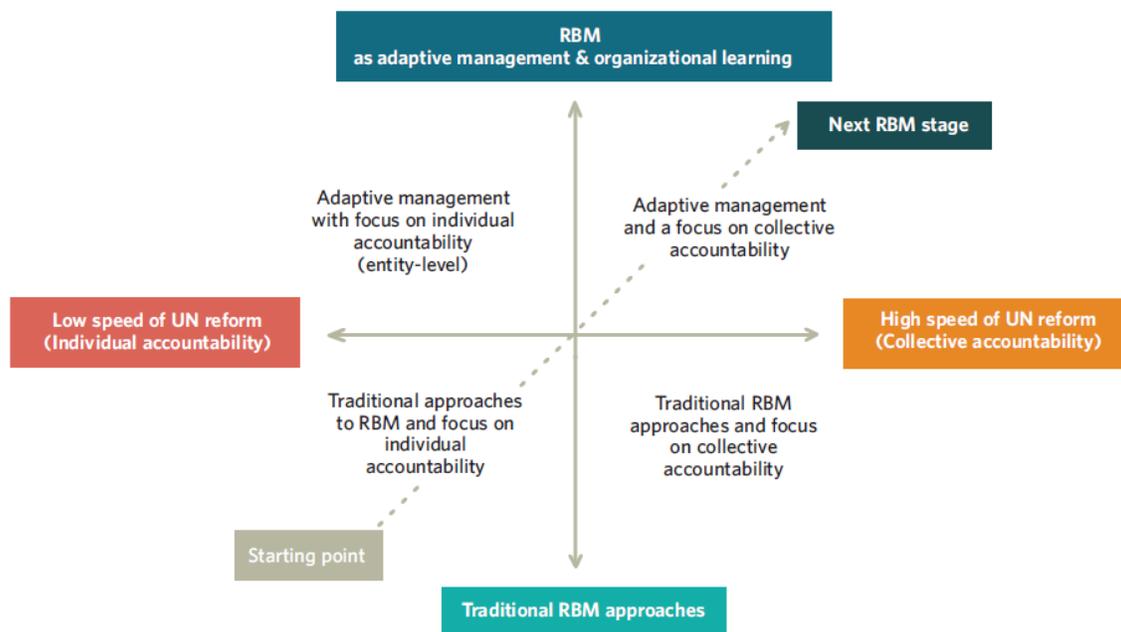
20. At the time of writing the evaluation report, UNFPA was using the evidence provided throughout the evaluation process to reflect on potential solutions to further develop the new stage of RBM.

VI. Proposed way forward

21. The leverage flow, shown in figure 4, has emerged during the developmental evaluation as a model to guide the organizational development of RBM solutions and to move to the next stage of RBM by making sure the solutions tackle the root causes of persistent RBM challenges. The leverage flow model follows a logical sequence of causal influence between the five interdependent creative tensions and works out a framework to identify leverage point areas.

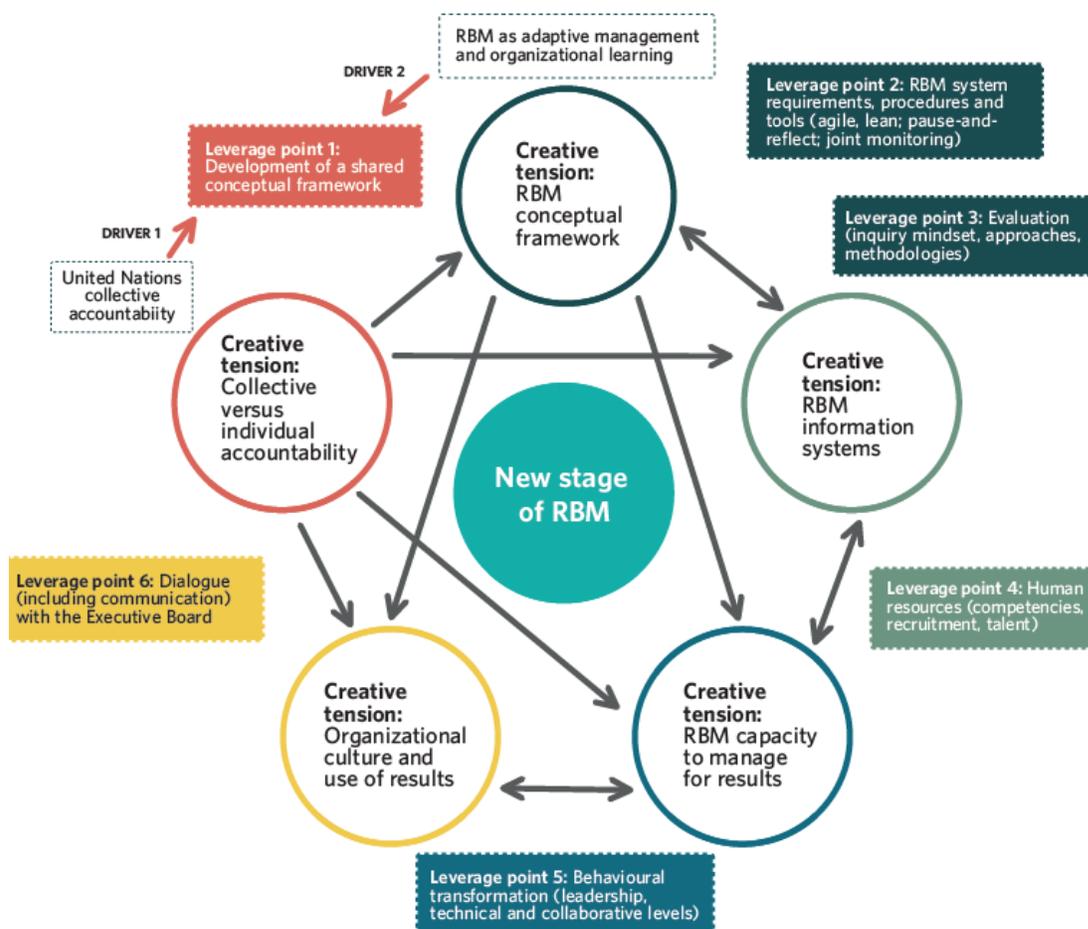
22. Two overarching drivers determine the evolution of RBM and the possible scenarios. The first one is the increase in United Nations collective accountability driven by the current evolution of the United Nations reform agenda. This driver is linked to the creative tension “collective accountability versus individual accountability” (CT2). The second driver is the move towards adaptive management within and outside the United Nations development system. This driver is linked to the “RBM conceptual framework”, as adaptive management is a trend that responds to current gaps on how to understand the focus and scope of RBM.

Figure 3
Scenarios for the new stage of RBM



23. As shown in figure 3, UNFPA should gradually move from a traditional approach to RBM, with a focus on individual UNFPA accountability, towards a next stage of RBM, which includes a focus on United Nations collective accountability and adaptive management. This is emerging as the evolutionary pathway towards a renewed approach to implementing RBM, putting organizational learning at the heart of RBM.

Figure 4
The leverage flow: identifying the change pathway



24. Taking into account the norms-based nature of United Nations agencies, organizational efforts to develop the next stage of RBM should first focus on the development of a shared conceptual framework (the first leverage point). This would align the organization towards a shared vision around RBM as the first step for building the foundations for the next stage.

25. The resulting conceptual framework should inform the second leverage point: the development of RBM information systems (CT5) that strike a balance between (a) an agile, standard, one-size-fits-all system that serves the purpose of accountability for funding through corporate reporting, and (b) adaptive field-level customized information systems that allow operationalizing learning for adaptation and serve the purpose of organizational learning and improvement.

26. The third leverage point emerges at the intersection between the RBM conceptual framework (CT1) and information systems (CT5). This leverage point is about mainstreaming evaluative thinking and the substantive (as opposed to formal) use of evaluations across all levels of the organization, especially in the field (regional and country offices), where results are implemented. This leverage point is closely related to the conceptual framework, given that the evaluation function is a constitutive pillar of RBM. It is also related to information systems,

given that the adaptive, data-driven, learning-focused nature of evaluations in adaptive management is linked to new methods, approaches and tools, and is ultimately linked to information systems.

27. The fourth leverage point is placed in the area of human resources. This leverage point emerges at the interplay between the conceptual framework (CT1) and the capacity to manage for results (CT4), given that the competency requirements for recruiting new talent and training current staff on RBM should build upon the updated RBM concepts and be aligned with the RBM purpose.

28. Once talent requirements and updated competencies are clear, the stage will be set to work intensively on the fifth leverage point. This leverage point deals with the development of normative tools and behavioural skills aimed at incentivizing the behavioural transformation required in order to foster a results culture (in terms of technical, leadership and collaborative skill sets). It emerges at the intersection between the creative tensions related to capacity (CT4) and culture (CT3). The evidence found throughout the evaluation has revealed a sequential logic by which individual capacity to manage for results is a prerequisite to developing a results culture in the organization.

29. The sixth and last leverage point, engaging Board Members in a dialogue on the way forward, is a prerequisite that cuts across and influences the development of all the other leverage points. This dialogue could serve as an input to the development of the next stage of RBM.

30. The following sections discuss in detail the leverage points and identify potential entry points to start working in the development of solutions towards the next stage of RBM.

Leverage point 1. The development of a shared conceptual framework

31. This leverage point reflects the need to develop a clear, shared understanding of the main purposes of RBM and how to articulate them in practice in a new stage of RBM characterized by adaptive management and collective accountability.

Emergent entry points

- (a) Setting up a multi-level, interdivisional mechanism (for example, an RBM action group or taskforce team) to articulate the organizational development process associated with the transition to the new stage of RBM. This coordination mechanism would optimally include headquarters, regional and country offices and involve all UNFPA business units in different ways. This RBM action group or taskforce team would be in charge of outlining the road map for the transition to the new stage of RBM and articulating work in the development of a shared RBM vision for the organization. A suggested sequence for the development of that shared vision would be to discuss and agree on the purpose; develop principles and standards based on the purpose; translate principles and standards into clear operational definitions of key terms; define the scope of RBM and clear specifications on the different levels of results; and articulate an RBM framework or strategy or policy.

Leverage point 2. RBM system requirements, procedures and tools

32. A number of current RBM gaps and bottlenecks are reflected in system requirements, procedures and tools. Revising the current system requirements in light of the analysis of root causes could bring significant changes.

Emergent entry points

- (a) *Re-engineer business processes*: rationalize current RBM tools and processes based on their purpose and value to the user. This process should focus on making reporting more efficient so that time is freed up to “pause and reflect” – this is one of the most important aspects of organizational learning for adaptation.
- (b) *Test, pilot and experiment with adaptive tools*: there is a wide array of adaptive tools already tested by other organizations that could be piloted in the context of UNFPA. Some

of these tools are strategy testing; data-driven adaptive management; complexity-aware monitoring; and causal-link monitoring. Testing and experimenting with outcome data-collection systems would also be appropriate, given that outcome-data availability is crucial for a meaningful results-based management approach. Inside UNFPA, there are other interesting approaches that could be further explored, such as the community-based information systems with implementing partners in Kenya. It would be advisable to link with the Innovation Fund in the framework of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative Phase II strategy, which recognizes the need for more agile and lean monitoring approaches, done on a more frequent and real-time basis, as well as the need for methods that allow outcome monitoring by capturing intended as well as unintended effects.

- (c) *Incorporate pause-and-reflect in the piloting*: interviews with organizations that have been exploring adaptive management approaches revealed that proper pause-and-reflect practices are at the core of organizational learning strategies for adaptation. Thus, piloting pause-and-reflect practices would be of primary importance. In this regard, it could be particularly interesting to take advantage of the recently launched RBM Seal (a corporate initiative aimed at fostering a results culture in UNFPA) to identify adaptive pause-and-reflect practices across UNFPA.
- (d) *Establish collaborations*: it is important to network and establish collaborations and institutional links with those exploring practical approaches and research on organizational learning for adaptation. There are a number of organizations experimenting and exploring practical ways to implement adaptive management approaches, including the Global Learning for Adaptive Management Initiative.

Leverage point 3. Evaluation

33. The term ‘evaluation’ here refers to the entire evaluation function across UNFPA as well as evaluation as an inquiring technique embedded into programmes. Interviews with organizations that have been exploring adaptive management approaches highlight that organizational learning is intrinsically linked with evaluation. In particular, adaptive management is closely associated with the increasing use of evaluations and with the development of an inquiring mindset across the organization.

Emergent entry points

- (a) *Develop corporate learning agendas*: an option to foster an evaluative mindset geared towards organizational learning is to use a corporate learning agenda and the ensuing inquiry frameworks. Expanding the tools for an evidence base beyond country programme evaluations would also help foster an evaluative mindset. In this regard, the evidence gathered by country programme evaluations could be expanded with combined evidence from applied research, studies, reviews and ad-hoc assessments in order to build an evidence base at the service of organizational learning.
- (b) *Explore targeted evaluation methods*: another entry point would be exploring which evaluation methods are more appropriately able to capture the value of the UNFPA business model as well as capturing complexity. Some examples of these methods include outcome harvesting; process tracing; realist evaluation; and contribution analysis.
- (c) *Explore learning-focused design approaches*: it would be advisable to explore evaluation design approaches geared towards maximizing organizational learning, such as formative evaluations, developmental evaluations, participatory evaluations and joint evaluation designs, whereby users take part in the design of the evaluation.
- (d) *Liaise with knowledge management*: it would be advisable to link the entry points with the UNFPA knowledge management strategy, launched in December 2018. The strategy includes several elements very conducive to delivering thinking and adaptive programming.

Leverage point 4. Human resources

34. Capacity to manage for results not only hinges on technical knowledge and tools and procedures but also on attitudinal behaviours and mindsets and on collaborative intelligence. Organizations working on adaptive management and organizational learning stress the importance of aligning behaviours and mindsets in an organization in order to make RBM work. In this regard staff, competencies, recruitment strategies and talent acquisition are essential for the transition to a new stage of RBM.

Emergent entry points

- (a) *Review the current frameworks in light of the analysis presented by the evaluation:* staff job descriptions, the competency framework, the human resources strategy, staff learning and career development, and current managerial certification programmes.
- (b) *Operationalize the United Nations Leadership Framework:* this could be translated into a specific leadership development strategy for UNFPA.
- (c) The RBM Seal offers good possibilities as a mechanism to map out and identify the competencies and skills that characterize “RBM champions” in the transition towards adaptive programming and collective accountability.
- (d) Learn from other organizations that have valuable experience in implementing adaptive management.

Leverage point 5. Behavioural transformation

35. This leverage point is closely linked to the previous one (LP4). Whereas leverage point four focuses on the capacity requirements for individual staff, behavioural transformation is related to the organizational ways of working and to team behaviour, that is to say, in the actual capacity of business units to operate RBM effectively and efficiently beyond individual capacities.

Emergent entry points

- (a) The organizational culture change initiative led by the Change Management Secretariat offers a very opportune and consistent entry point to begin tangible work on behavioural transformations.
- (b) *Implement fully fledged adaptive management pilots in selected country offices:* these pilots could include applying adaptive programming approaches, from planning to evaluation, and could cover different UNFPA country quadrants (pink and red country quadrants, for instance) so that the specificities of the different modes of engagement can be captured and observed. The fully fledged pilots could include crucial aspects, such as creation of systematic spaces to pause-and-reflect, design and operationalization of outcome-based monitoring systems, and testing of real-time, joint monitoring systems.
- (c) *Leverage the RBM Seal:* the RBM Seal could be used intentionally to identify “champion” country offices as well as to identify adaptive management practices specific to UNFPA. In other words, practices that capture what adaptive management means and implies in the specific context of the UNFPA business model.
- (d) *Implement new ways of transferring practical RBM capacity beyond traditional training sessions:* examples of this could be learning-by-doing; reflection-in-action; peer-to-peer learning; coaching, mentoring and shadowing; and approaches that link the transferral of capacity to real problem-solving, ongoing RBM processes and actual RBM deliverables.
- (e) *Monitor and assess RBM principles and standards:* the recently drafted RBM principles and standards to be applied in the RBM Seal delineate a range of behaviours and RBM practices whereby results information is used for informing learning. Monitoring and assessing (including through evaluations) these RBM principles could provide very useful information on the evolution of transformational behaviours towards the new stage of RBM in UNFPA. The availability of methodologies to evaluate principles (principles-focused evaluation) makes this possibility even more feasible.

Leverage point 6. Dialogue with the Executive Board

36. A number of the persistent challenges in RBM are due to systemic root causes that cannot be tackled by UNFPA alone. Moreover, it would be highly risky to embark upon changes and transformations without framing the process in a dialogue with the Executive Board.

Emergent entry points

- (a) *Engage in a dialogue around the nature of inquiries by Executive Board members:* at present, inquiries are often less centred around organizational adaptation and learning but rather more on accountability for funding channelled through reporting. If adaptive management and collective accountability are to be a reality, the requests from the Executive Board will have to evolve accordingly and aim for adaptation and learning, as well as accountability.

VII. Organizational development: the effects of the evaluation

37. A distinct feature of developmental evaluations is that they are interventions in themselves. Developmental evaluations intend to contribute to the organizational development processes they inform through evaluative input delivered through continuous feedback and a high degree of engagement.

38. A wide array of business units across UNFPA has been engaged with the Evaluation Office on the evaluation, to various degrees and in a range of formats, both at headquarters level (the Change Management Secretariat within the Office of the Executive Director, the Innovation Fund Secretariat, the Resource Mobilization Branch within the Division for Communication and Strategic Partnerships, the Policy and Strategy Division, the Division of Management Services, the Division for Human Resources, the Technical Division, the Information Technology Solutions Office) and at field level (country and regional offices).

39. This evaluation also engaged with several external actors beyond UNFPA, which bring relational capital to the organization. These include the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning at USAID, the OECD-DAC Results Community, and the UNICEF Fields Result Group, among others.

40. The most significant reactions, effects and changes perceived so far by the evaluation team are: (a) increased consensus on the next stage of RBM; (b) changing mindsets; (c) high-level leadership engagement; (d) breaking silos and aligning business units to a fully-fledged, RBM-driven organizational development process; (e) shifting the focus from incremental improvement to development; (f) outreach of influence beyond UNFPA, including other United Nations agencies and development cooperation actors; (g) creating momentum to move to the next stage of RBM; (h) multi-level organizational engagement; (i) timeliness around the sense of urgency to move forward; and (j) incorporating elements of the developmental evaluation approach (purpose, scope and methodology) into the organization.