



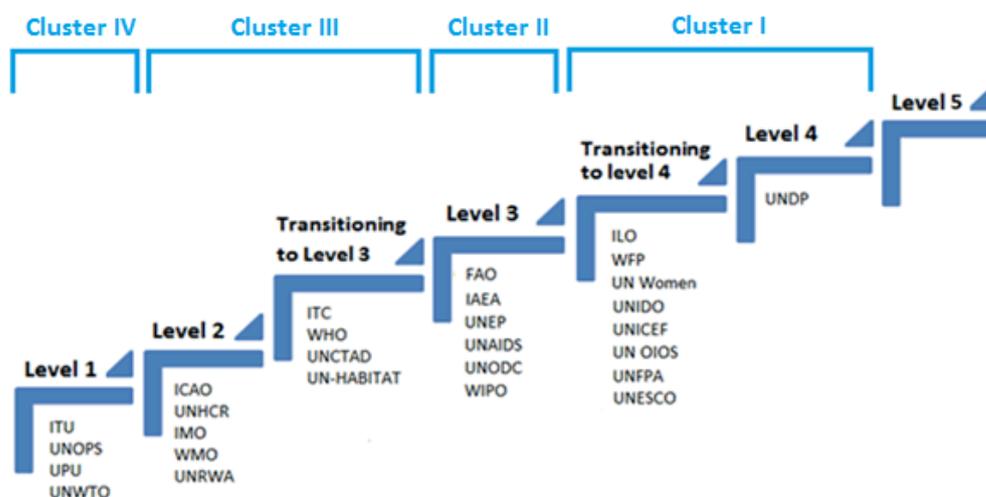
## A Framework for Strengthening Evaluation and Organizational Learning in WHO

### Introduction and background

In the past, evaluation has been a weaker area in WHO’s oversight work, with no specific evaluation policy and limited resources devoted to the issue (JIU/REP/2012/6). All too often evaluation has been an afterthought in planning, viewed as an optional luxury for well-funded programmes, or carried out only upon donor request. Furthermore, the utilization and follow-up of evaluation findings and recommendations, especially in relation to organizational learning, has not been optimal.

For the last several years, the Organization’s evaluation function was housed in the Office of Internal Oversight Services (IOS), where it was co-located and integrated with other functions. As such, the function was not highly visible. In its most recent survey of the overall level of maturity of the corporate evaluation function in UN agencies (core components assessed: institutional framework; relevance and readiness for emerging challenges; independence; quality; and utility), JIU classifies WHO as ‘below average’ (JIU/REP/2014/6 being finalized, see also Fig 1 below from the report).

Figure 1. Overall level of maturity of the corporate evaluation function for 28 Organizations.



However, there has been much recent progress in the evaluation work undertaken in WHO, with critical milestones such as the approval of the Evaluation Policy in 2012, the review and approval by the Executive Board of the first biennial evaluation workplan in May 2014, and the establishment of the Global Network on Evaluation (GNE), coupled with the release of the *WHO Evaluation Practice*

*Handbook* as an instrument to guide and harmonize evaluation work being conducted across the organization and to support mainstreaming of high quality evaluation work.

To build on this, and to further support the ongoing WHO reform process, strengthening evaluation and organizational learning has been identified as one critical component to take forward. As a first step on 1 August 2014, the evaluation function was moved from within the Office of Internal Oversight Services to become a separate unit to support independent evaluation within the Office of the Director-General. The DG has also requested this current study to look at the evaluation function in WHO and to review best practices and models in other entities, in order to propose a framework for strengthening the evaluation function in the organization.

As part of the review process, consultations were held with the heads of evaluation and evaluation teams in a number of key organizations and with other stakeholders including:

- i) UN entities, (focussing mainly on the agencies that were judged better than WHO in the current JIU review of UN evaluation function, i.e. UNDP, ILO, WFP, UNIDO, UNICEF, UN Women, UN OIOS, UNESCO, IAEA, UNFPA, FAO, UNAIDS, WIPO);
- ii) Other entities with good evaluation reputations such as World Bank/IEG, IFAD, OECD, OECD DAC Evalnet Secretariat, GAVI, Global Fund;
- iii) Member States' institutions;
- iv) Interested Member States both in Geneva and capitals; and
- v) Other external and internal informants including the GNE.

The consultations focussed on the following six critical aspects in relation to strengthening evaluation and organizational learning:

- building a culture of evaluation (understanding what this means to the entity/ organization and what is being done to achieve it);
- establishing an enabling environment (policies, resources, organizational arrangement, and coordination/oversight);
- modalities and scope of evaluation (types of evaluation conducted, the nature of corporate and decentralized evaluation, quality assurance and outsourcing);
- facilitating organizational learning (understanding how this is done and how it informs strategic planning/programming and policy/decision making etc.);
- interrelationships between evaluation and other assessments including internal ones (such as audits, programme budget assessments, regular progress reports), UN –wide assessments (JIU surveys) and external donor-initiated assessments (such as MOPAN, MAR etc.); and
- communicating evaluation work and findings (how is this handled, both to internal and external stakeholders/audiences).

### **What is evaluation in the WHO context?**

The UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms for evaluation define it as follows:

*....an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions and contributions of the organizations of the UN system. An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision making processes...*

In simpler terms, evaluation is intended to provide accountability for achieving results from the use of resources, and learning from experience in ways that can be put into practical use. Furthermore, evaluation should influence policy and operational decisions.

Evaluation, although part of WHO's broader accountability framework, is distinct from other functions in the oversight spectrum. Whereas audit and the internal control framework focus on compliance, evaluation focuses on results and on understanding what works, why and how. Evaluation also differs from monitoring and the PB performance assessments, as it gives attention to not only whether expected results are being achieved, but also looks more widely at issues of relevance, context, causality and eventual impact and sustainability. Furthermore, evaluation is an independent exercise, while both monitoring and PBPA are self-assessments.

Evaluation and research are closely related, with both contributing to WHO's knowledge base. However, research seeks theoretical knowledge and aims to test hypotheses related to a given objective, whereas evaluation examines the achievement, relevance and sustainability of results of policies and actions.

The evaluation function needs to be able to integrate and use information generated from research, monitoring and review activities.

### **How will WHO's evaluation function be judged?**

Three principal criteria need to be satisfied in order for our evaluation function and products to be considered of high quality:

- Independence of evaluations and evaluation systems. The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process of policy making, delivering and managing our programmatic and administrative work.
- Credibility of evaluations. The credibility of evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of evaluators and the degree of transparency of the evaluation process.
- Utility of evaluations. To have an impact on decision-making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful and be presented in a clear and concise way. Findings must contribute to organizational learning and performance improvement.

These three overarching criteria inform the proposed framework for strengthening evaluation and organizational learning in WHO. Satisfying these criteria will go a substantial way towards building the confidence of Member States and other stakeholders, both in our evaluation function and in the overall work of WHO.

### **Other important aspects of the evaluation function**

Another critical aspect of the evaluation function is the balance between independence and engagement in undertaking evaluation work. While maintaining strong independence covers the accountability dimension, more engagement with management/programme staff in the evaluation process contributes better towards learning. Most entities try to find a balance between these two, not only in their overall approach to evaluation work, but also for each individual evaluation – for example, one evaluation may be more focussed on addressing the accountability dimension, while another may focus on utility i.e. the learning dimension.

Yet another important issue for most UN agencies is the interrelationship between the corporate/centralized evaluation undertaken by the central evaluation unit and the decentralized evaluations commissioned and managed outside of the central unit. The proposed framework will seek to address this within the WHO context.

Based on desk reviews, consultations and review of evaluation functions of various multilateral and bilateral entities, and the review of WHO's ongoing evaluation work, the following framework which incorporates best practices and models that could be implemented within the WHO context is proposed. *The framework is both ambitious and forward-looking. It should be seen as work in progress rather than an end result.*

## **A Framework for Strengthening Evaluation and Organizational Learning**

### **Objective:**

1. To contribute to establishing a culture of evaluation at all levels of the Organization, so that evaluation plays a critical role in WHO in improving performance, increasing accountability for results, and promoting organizational learning.

### **Establishing an enabling environment and governance**

2. It is proposed that the Evaluation Office is established as an independent entity in the office of the Director-General.

3. The Director of the Evaluation Office (EVL) will have the same line reporting as the Director IOS, i.e. reporting directly to the DG on administrative matters, and reporting annually on evaluation matters to the Executive Board. The Director will have the same degree of reporting independence to the EB as Director IOS.

4. The work of the Evaluation Office will be guided by the Evaluation Policy, an Evaluation Strategic Plan (2016-19) and biennial evaluation workplans (2016-17 and 2018-19).

- The Evaluation Policy (2012) will need to be revised in light of the changes introduced through this new framework and the recent organizational changes.
- The Evaluation Strategic Plan will provide the vision and a results-based agenda to strengthen the evaluation function in WHO, guiding the work across all levels of the organization, thus covering both the corporate and decentralized evaluation work. It will be also informed by the reform implementation plan, especially in relation to the specific outcome on evaluation.
- The biennial evaluation workplan will incorporate both the corporate and decentralized evaluations planned for a given biennium and will be reviewed and approved by the EB.

### **Evaluation capacity and resources**

#### Evaluation office staffing/budget

5. The Evaluation Office (EVL) will be led by a Director of high calibre and expertise at D1 level recruited through a competitive process. The staffing of the office and corresponding budget (including for activities) to be further discussed.

#### Other internal/external resources to help expand evaluation capacity

6. It is proposed that there are **designated evaluation focal points in RD's offices**, to support evaluation activities at the regional office and country offices. This will provide a mechanism and capacity to coordinate ongoing decentralized evaluations and to also track and follow-up management response/action at the regional level. Ideally this would be a person dedicated to evaluation, but an M&E focal point could be an alternative. It would be good practice to keep this function separate from the planning/programme management function.

7. The **Global Network on Evaluation (GNE)** is a recently established internal network of staff acting to promote the culture of evaluation, facilitate sharing of information and knowledge management, and strengthen the practice of evaluation at WHO. Its role and composition needs to be revisited in order to allow it to play a stronger and more prominent role in future evaluations and in organizational learning.

8. An expanding **community of practice** made up of programme staff with an interest/experience in evaluation, who will be trained along with the GNE on WHO evaluation policy and practices, would play an important role in both supporting ongoing evaluation and as champions for evaluative work within the organization.

9. An **Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG)** would be established. This technical group of 8-10 independent evaluation experts will serve in an advisory capacity and support Director EVL (including review and guidance on the biennial workplans; and review of evaluation reports/recommendations for quality and utility). The group will not have a reporting role to the governing bodies or to DG. It is separate from the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee (IEOAC) and will not report to it. Director EVL will provide regular updates on evaluation work to the IEAOC. *(To consider consulting the IEOAC on the proposal to establish the EAG)*

10. A prequalified **roster of evaluation experts and institutions** (public/private) to support the evaluation work of the organization will be maintained. Both central and decentralized evaluations will be supported by external expertise, either individual evaluation consultants or institutions (evaluation consortia; academia; consultancy firms). Models of outsourcing can include both full outsourcing and co-sourcing.

### **Evaluation workplan, scope and modalities**

11. Starting with the 2016-17 biennium, it is proposed that a biennial workplan is developed incorporating both the corporate and decentralized evaluations planned in that biennium. The workplan will be developed in consultation with the GPG, ADsG and other relevant staff, including programme directors and heads of country offices especially for decentralized evaluations.

12. The GNE and regional evaluation focal points will play an important role in this exercise, and criteria set out in the evaluation policy will guide the selection and prioritization of the evaluations to be included. The Evaluation Advisory Group will review the workplan and provide guidance. The workplan will be finalized by Director EVL and presented to the PBAC and EB in January 2016 for review and approval.

13. **Corporate/centralized evaluations** will be managed, commissioned or conducted by the Evaluation Office (EVL). Proposal for corporate evaluations/biennium: 2 evaluations linked to a GPW leadership priority; 3-4 Programme evaluations (focussing on specific programmes); 2-4 thematic evaluations (topics such as a strategy, new ways of working, cross-cutting-theme or core function) and 4 Office-specific evaluations (focus on work of WHO in a country, in a region or HQ in respect of WHO's core roles, function, objectives and commitments – *these office-specific evaluations also need to be closely coordinated with IOS*).

14. **Decentralized evaluations** are evaluations managed, commissioned or conducted outside the central Evaluation Office. In this instance, the central evaluation office would provide quality assurance and technical backstopping (including access to a pre-qualified global roster of external evaluators). Coherence and harmonization across the Organization is achieved through adherence to guidance provided in the *WHO Evaluation Practice Handbook* and the GNE task force on quality assurance.

15. These decentralized evaluations are initiated by HQ clusters, regional offices or country offices, and could be programme evaluations; thematic evaluations; or regional or country-office specific evaluations. It is important to note that these will only be considered evaluations if they fulfil the criteria of an independent evaluation, including being undertaken by persons/evaluators not directly linked to the design and delivery of the programme or activity.

16. A vast majority of these decentralized evaluations are in fact project evaluations linked to donor-funded projects. Here the proposal is to start in 2016-17 to automatically trigger a mandatory evaluation for any new projects with a budget over 10 million USD (these should include a compulsory 2-3% budget for evaluation -and potential evaluation questions- in the project proposals that are agreed with the donors); and, based on lessons learnt, the trigger threshold could decrease to projects with >5 million USD budgets.

17. As far as possible, all decentralized evaluations need to be captured in the biennial workplan that is presented to the January EB at the start of a given biennium. It is proposed that regional decentralized evaluations are discussed at the Regional Committees, including findings/recommendations of completed evaluations and discussions of the regional workplan for the next biennium.

### **Reports/recommendations**

18. Draft reports from corporate evaluations will be reviewed for quality and utility by EVL staff and a member of the Evaluation Advisory Group, and then circulated for comments and discussed in feedback meetings with senior management and other relevant stakeholders. The final report will also contain a set of recommendations/action points.

19. Draft reports from decentralized evaluations will be initially reviewed by EVL staff and a GNE quality assurance taskforce member, and then circulated for comments and discussed in feedback meetings with the commissioning entity and other relevant stakeholders. The final report will also contain a set of recommendations/action points.

20. Final reports and recommendations/action points will be made available on the EVL website.

### **Management response/action**

21. A management response system determines the procedures for dealing with completed evaluations, and such a system is a vital tool for promoting the effectiveness of evaluations. A management response system can be understood as a way of linking evaluation findings to future activities. It governs the procedures dealing with a completed evaluation and is intended to facilitate

the process of making evaluations an integral part of an organisation's learning and decision-making process

22. The Director-General or her designate (a RD or an ADG) will assume ownership of the management response for a given corporate evaluation. This means ensuring that a formal management response is prepared and that the implementation of the agreed recommendations/actions is tracked and followed-up.

23. For decentralised evaluations, the ownership of the management response, including ensuring implementation of recommendations, is with the RDs for their respective regions or with an ADG for evaluations from his or her cluster.

24. In line with good practice, and as a means to help ensure transparency and accountability, it is proposed to establish an evaluation tracking system that functions as a database where evaluation findings can be uploaded and management responses/actions be tracked. It is proposed that this tracking system be accessible on the EVL website.

### **Organizational learning**

25. Learning and performance improvement is a key outcome of evaluation work. Thus establishing effective feedback loops from evaluation to policy-and decision makers, operational staff and other stakeholders is critical for evaluation lessons are to be learnt, and for evaluation findings to inform key decisions. Learning should also contribute towards a culture where evaluation is integral to the planning, design and implementation of policies and programmes.

26. There are a number of ways, both formal and informal, to promote and ensure organizational learning. Feedback into senior-level decision-making and action is promoted through the engagement of the GPG, ADsG and other senior staff in various stages of the evaluation process, including consultation to develop the workplan, commissioning of the decentralized evaluations, and the ownership of the management response/action for evaluations.

27. It is proposed that the PB 18-19 development process includes a separate section on evaluation findings that informed the proposed programmatic results in the documents that go to the Regional Committees and the EB for review and comments.

28. Other strategy and policy documents, including resolutions, to be reviewed by the governing bodies could also highlight how they were informed by any relevant evaluation findings. In some cases, evaluation findings could also help to sunset or pause implementation of specific programmes/activities, including in cases of scale-up or follow-up activities. In other instances, evaluation findings could be the reason to undertake necessary mid-course corrections, or to initiate new activities and programmes.

29. Various other avenues exist to promote learning during the evaluation process, and these are highlighted in Annex 2.

30. Findings and evidence generated through evaluation should also be part of the organization's broader knowledge management efforts. Thus working closely with the knowledge management department (KER) to integrate evaluation lessons with other forms of learning is important.

### **Communicating evaluation work**

31. An important additional route to strengthen the culture of learning, and increase transparency and stakeholder ownership is to communicate evaluation work and findings effectively. Communication efforts will need to consider the range of potential target audiences and the diversity of these audiences when preparing the necessary communication products.

32. Communication of evaluation results in a timely and effective manner can influence views not only of staff but also of Member States (delegates, parliaments, decision-makers), the broader donor community and other stakeholders. It contributes towards transparency, and building confidence and trust in the work of the organization.

33. A number of useful models exist for communicating the evaluation work, including:

- The annual report to the WHO governing bodies;
- Annual or biennial reports to a wider stakeholder group and the public;
- Stakeholder seminars and webinars (including targeted briefings to units/country offices covered by the evaluation);
- Briefings to interested Member States;
- Short, clear executive summaries of completed evaluations that are publicly available;
- Evaluation findings and ongoing work presented in a quarterly electronic newsletter (with a synthesis of a few evaluations); and
- A well maintained, informative and up-to-date website.

### **Interrelationship with other external assessments and reviews**

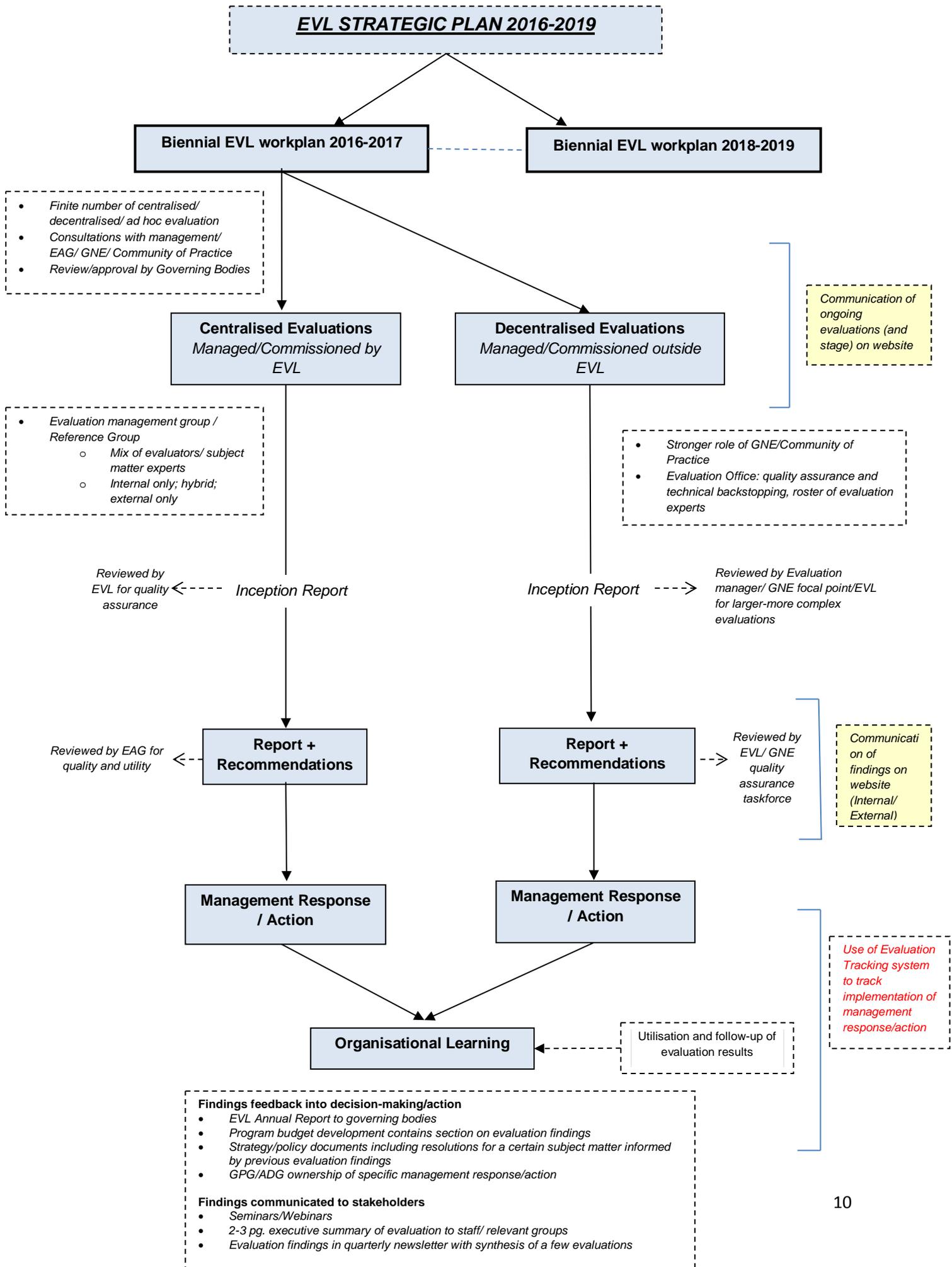
34. It is proposed that the EVL office becomes the organizational point of contact for external evaluations/reviews/assessments such as the JIU surveys, MOPAN and bilateral reviews (MAR etc.). In taking this forward, EVL will work closely with PRP, CCU, CRM and other relevant departments.

### **Annexes:**

A diagrammatic outline of the framework is presented in [Annex 1](#).

Further avenues for organizational learning are presented in [Annex 2](#).

**Annex 1: A diagrammatic outline of the framework**



## Annex 2: Further Avenues for Organizational Learning

