

UNITED NATIONS

RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR
PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST



NATIONS UNIES

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REFUGIES DE PALESTINE DANS LE PROCHE-ORIENT

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27 November 2011

Dear Mr. Cunningham,

UNRWA wishes to express its appreciation for the opportunity to be one of five multilateral organizations assessed in the 2011 MOPAN Organisational Effectiveness Assessment. We particularly value the highly participatory approach undertaken by MOPAN Institutional Lead countries, Sweden and Finland. Their refinement of the survey questionnaire and integration of feedback for the final report allowed for a very successful assessment that appropriately reflected the unique nature of UNRWA.

With over 130 respondents (out of a total of 192) relaying their feedback, we are very pleased to observe that the overall perception of performance was positive. Across the twenty key performance indicators used to assess UNRWA, 85% were positive. UNRWA also recognizes that the distribution of ratings found in responses from peer organizations, donors based in the field and at their respective headquarters was consistent notwithstanding the limited number of responses received from host governments in the survey. Many of the findings in the Assessment are a result of Organisational Development which UNRWA embarked upon from 2006 to 2009. This management reform programme enabled the Agency to improve strategic management through the establishment of a Medium Term Strategy and cascading Implementation Plans containing detailed frameworks to measure results against planned achievements.

Many of the challenges highlighted in the report reflect challenges within most, if not all, multilateral organisations. It is noteworthy that the majority of the findings are in areas that UNRWA has recently endeavoured to reform or are presently undergoing efforts to improve. While, Annex 1 of this letter provides MOPAN with a more detailed response to the distinct areas covered by the Assessment, I wish to address a few of the issues raised.

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The Agency welcomes the observations made by the Assessment on the need to continue further improvements in its result-based management mechanisms and human resources performance management systems. In an organisation as complex and multi-layered as UNRWA, we recognise that long-lasting reforms cannot be achieved overnight. Nonetheless, in 2011, the Agency held its first programme performance review process, allowing it to utilise its newly developed results-based management tools to compare and analyse performance against set indicators. This process will undoubtedly undergo refinement as further reviews are held in the future, but, coupled with a more strategic use of evaluations, the Agency is of the opinion that it is on track to improve its programme performance capacity. Likewise, in 2011, the Agency introduced a new performance management system for Education staff in Gaza, and presently has plans to rollout this system across all functions in the Agency.

Notwithstanding progress made in implementing reforms, the Agency recognises that much work lies ahead to fully increase its effectiveness in the eyes of the refugees it serves. This Assessment comes at a point in time when UNRWA has reflected upon and assessed the future focus of continuing reform efforts. Taking into account lessons learnt from external reviews of its Education, Health and Relief and Social Services programmes and a recently conducted external evaluation of its Organisational Development programme, a new set of reform initiatives are being developed to improve the Agency's core services and the management practices that underpin their implementation. The observations in the present Assessment will greatly assist the Agency in ensuring that these future reforms address those core areas where further improvement is required.

To achieve the high-levels of organisational effectiveness desired, the Agency recognises that support, both financial and institutional, from stakeholders identified in the MOPAN survey, is critical for long-term success. The Agency will continue to work closely with its hosts and donors to achieve these improvements, and appreciates the insights presented in this Assessment to consolidate progress achieved and formulate further improvements to make UNRWA a more effective service provider to Palestine refugees.

Yours sincerely,



Margot Ellis

Deputy Commissioner-General

Annex 1

UNRWA Detailed Response to MOPAN Organisational Effectiveness Assessment Observations

(i) Strategic Management

As outlined in the Assessment, UNRWA has implemented significant changes by way of a Medium Term Strategy and cascading Field and Headquarters Implementation Plans beginning with the 2010-11 biennium. UNRWA is in the process of leveraging experience gleaned from the 2010-11 biennium planning process to strengthen management processes and evidence-based decision-making. A Results-Based Monitoring system was launched in March 2010 and in 2011 was used to assess results against planned achievements. The Agency expects to have a Results Reporting Framework in place that consolidates current practices such as internal quarterly and annual Results Reviews (i.e., quantitative and qualitative analysis). The Assessment accurately anticipates that these nascent areas, whilst positive, will require continued investments to become institutionalised.

(ii) Operational Management

Many comments can be found throughout the Assessment that centre upon resource allocation. The Assessment correctly notes the volatile context in which the Agency operates and the chronic underfunding that has affected the Agency's ability to optimally allocate resources within the rigid structure it has to operate in. As long as resources are not able to meet the needs of refugees, the Agency notes that resource allocation will remain a challenging and complex area. Notwithstanding the above, the Agency has, over the present biennium, introduced improved budget allocation processes and considerably enhanced its financial management practice. The Agency is also in the process of developing a new Resource Mobilisation Strategy to enhance its capacity to attract further funding. While the Agency forecasts that resource mobilisation will continue to be challenging, it remains committed to explore all possible avenues and to further improve its internal resource allocation mechanisms.

The Agency agrees with the Assessment's comments regarding the need for further improvement in defining the roles and responsibilities of Headquarters and Field Offices. The Agency notes that programmatic reforms will address the roles of Headquarter Programme Departments and thus create further clarity in this area. At the same time, work is underway to strengthen executive management in the Agency, including with that of Field Offices and Headquarter departments and the inter-relation between the two. Other substantive efforts are being undertaken with respect to strengthening evaluation (see Knowledge Management section below) and in human resources such as improvement to the Agency's classification, compensation, and performance management systems. Improvements have also been put in place with respect to safety and security through the establishment of the Safety and Security Unit Working Group and a planned system for security management for all UNRWA staff, currently under pilot.

(iii) Relationship Management

The Agency is very pleased to observe that respondents were satisfied with how it operates in the region, its inter-agency participation and the quality of its contributions in policy dialogue.

(iv) Knowledge Management

The Agency takes note of the need to address the challenges associated with lessons learned and evaluations noted in the Assessment and the continual improvement of logical frameworks used for planning and monitoring. A substantial improvement is underway through the rationalisation of results frameworks between the 2010-11 and 2012-13 biennia. Improvements can also be seen in the evaluation function such as the March 2011 membership in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). The coverage of evaluations at the Agency-level resulted on average of over a half-dozen reports being undertaken on a yearly basis for the last three years, excluding those done at the Field Office level. The quality and breadth of these evaluations is significant given that health, education and relief and social services programmes have undergone extensive, external programmatic evaluations. The best example of using information from performance and recommendations from evaluations is observed in education whereby an Education Reform Strategy was launched in 2011. UNRWA is seeking to strengthen the evaluation section with the addition of a Chief of Evaluations and by adhering to UNEG norms and international best practice so that UNRWA becomes a stronger learning organisation.