



Regional Centers for  
Learning on Evaluation and Results

# CLEAR Mid-Term Evaluation: The CLEAR Board's Response to Recommendations by Universalia

Final Oct. 31, 2014



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**This mid-term evaluation had been commissioned by the Board** of the *Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results* (CLEAR) initiative to support and improve the initiative's implementation. It was commissioned by the CLEAR Board to have an independent assessment of the progress made at the mid-point in its lifecycle – between the initiative's inception in 2010 and its conclusion, tentatively set for 2018 –for the following purposes: (i) Learning for improvements in the rationale, design, management, implementation and governance of the CLEAR Global initiative; (ii) Accountability to the current funders of CLEAR for funds invested in CLEAR ; (iii) As a public good contributing knowledge on approaches to strengthening evaluation capacity in developing countries, designing and managing global initiatives. Four years into implementation, what was initially a proof-of-concept initiative is now moving into a more mature phase. Building on a firm foundation of experiences, relationships, and reputations, the Initiative can now face new challenges, very different from those of the early years. At the same time, there is now an opportunity to build phase II of the CLEAR initiative within closer view of the 2018 date, testing out what could become the basis for an eventual phase III of what its' founding organizations had hoped to be a long-term viable global partnership.

**Many of the mid-term evaluation's findings** – and some of its recommendations – have therefore been taken as useful and trusted input in the framing of CLEAR's phase II. At the same time, a number of the learnings documented by the evaluation may have become out of date for what will be a sharper and more mature collaborative knowledge partnership going forward. Similarly, some of the very specific recommendations may be irrelevant or impractical in light of the directions currently being developed for phase II. In either case, they are a strong reminder of how much the initiative has grown in maturity and delivery over the past years, and the CLEAR Board and its Centers are committed to ensure that every piece of insights will get drawn out of the report to ensure maximum learning. On behalf of the CLEAR community, we wish to thank Universalialia for work that will help us, either way, pave the way for CLEAR's maturation into phase II. As oftentimes happens in evaluation, the sheer act of getting evaluated, and engaging with our evaluators, is helping the CLEAR family of donors, centers, and stakeholders expand their views and improve their performance – something that we see happening right now.

**We largely concur with all the key findings by the mid-term evaluation** – while drawing, in a number of instances, slightly different conclusions that reflect progress made since the evaluation was done or specific insights into relevance and do-ability. Specifically, we concur with the four major findings that:

- **The CLEAR initiative is highly relevant and its mid-term targets have largely been achieved.** The initiative has been and continues to be relevant and is congruent with the global discourse on aid effectiveness, donors' interest in promoting development effectiveness, and government and non-government actors' need and demand for results in a wide range of countries. CLEAR's design combines interventions that leverage locally available institutions and strengths with

regional or global resources within the context of a global partnership. In light of the positive assessment of program delivery so far, we are confident of CLEAR's potential to achieve longer-term outcomes, well beyond 2018, instigating us to begin building towards a "beyond-2018" view.

- **The CLEAR initiative as an experiment needs to build improved frameworks, hypotheses, and definitions of success geared towards generating and managing the knowledge and insights, locally as well as globally, on what works and what does not in evaluation capacity building.** The initial set-up – in terms of theory of change, results framework, work plans and indicators – had been geared primarily towards the creation of a delivery “infrastructure” for evaluation capacity building efforts. With five Centers selected and operational, and a sixth on its way in the coming months, it is now possible to manage the partnership and its individual activities with a much more explicit balance between *learning* “how best to develop evaluation capacity” (in light of the experimental nature of its activities) and *delivering* on developing evaluation capacity. *Learning* will involve explicitly formulating the hypotheses underlying CLEAR's theory of change, testing and documenting the implementation experiences in different contexts and with varying resources, and purposefully generating knowledge from these experiences, while continuing to deliver on capacity development. Embedding such testing & learning explicitly in the CLEAR management processes and in its intended deliverables will drive more systematic harvesting and sharing of insights about evaluation capacity building. To this end, we have already begun to develop a *revised theory of change*, including a revised *results framework* and *core indicators* to reflect success and/or failures of the CLEAR program as a whole and of the CLEAR Centers individually as they build capacity to build evaluation capacity. These new formats, underpinned by appropriate management systems, will be launched early in 2015.
- **The CLEAR Secretariat has effectively fulfilled its assigned roles.** The Secretariat designed and got the program off the ground and has provided leadership and guidance for the Centers. Considering the focus on knowledge and learning needed going forward, for phase II, the Secretariat's role will be expanding, to serve more broadly as a *Global Resource Team*, also actively engaging in knowledge elicitation and facilitating cross country and cross regional learning to take place in a systematic format.
- **The CLEAR initiative's management and governance structures need to be adjusted to gain greater legitimacy in the eyes of its stakeholders, to ensure effective leadership on operational matters, to provide guidance and support for the initiative's knowledge and learning agenda, and to drive longer-term strategic decisions on the future of CLEAR.** We note that the initial governance and management structures were a reflection of (i) the initiative being a funding partnership between the initiative's donors, and (ii) that at the incubation phase key stakeholders – namely the Centers – had not yet been identified. We recognize the evolution needed going forward towards a more mature phase of the program. We have also asked the current Chair of the Board to step up and take on a *stronger leadership role for the strategic and operational management* of the global agenda. We are revising and expanding the Terms of Reference of the current Secretariat/future Global Resource Team to explicitly take on

accountabilities for knowledge management and learning. And with the CLEAR Centers now firmly in the picture, we are embarking on a *new governance structure* that will include Centers as much as donors so that a fuller set of *experiences and diverse views* can drive the initiative's strategic agenda.

Our responses to the specific recommendations are discussed below and then summarized in Table 1, together with a timeline for implementation.

**Recommendation 1:** The CLEAR Board should decide if CLEAR is an experiment that is primarily intended to generate lessons learned that can inform future phases of CLEAR and other (M&E) capacity building initiatives. The Board should approve a set of overarching learning questions that CLEAR seeks to answer as well as the types of information that it will monitor at the level of the initiative (p. 100 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the recommendation.**

**CLEAR as an experiment.** The concept of “CLEAR as an experiment” had not been framed in terms of explicit hypotheses at the program's inception. However, it was indeed understood by its donors and by the various academic institutions that progressively signed on to house a CLEAR Center that the initiative was to *generate* as well as build on existing knowledge and ways of working to build capacity to build capacity in evaluation, in addition to and while delivering M&E capacity development services. The underlying concepts and approaches deployed by the CLEAR initiative were and still are innovative, specifically in the context of the evaluation capacity building field: focusing on mobilizing interest in evaluation capacity and doing so along all its three key dimensions simultaneously – individual, organizational, and systemic. The clear approach, purposefully combining interventions that leverage locally available expertise and institutions in concert with regional or global resources within the context of a global partnership is unique, too, as is the “cascading” hub-and-spoke approach. Combining these approaches continues to stimulate improvements – in terms of the individual interventions, their delivery modalities, and combinations, as well as in terms of the collaboration among Centers and the global/local relationships that are being leveraged to strengthen local delivery of capacity building services.

**Learning questions (hypotheses) to be built on a revised theory of change.** As the program enters its Phase II, we are now in the position to formulate the underlying learning questions (i.e., testing hypotheses regarding building evaluation capacity) explicitly – based on a revised theory of change and results framework that will draw on the experiences made with the CLEAR approach to building evaluation capacity so far. The revised theory of change and the results framework will make explicit the “intended pathway” of each Center as well as of the program as a whole, and the indicators will be refined alongside, include both the learning and the delivery dimension of CLEAR.

**Decision:** The next phase of CLEAR will include a greater focus on learning from the experimental elements of CLEAR while continuing to deliver strongly towards its core capacity development objective. The future CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) will approve a set of learning questions that CLEAR seeks to answer - as well as the types of information that it will monitor at the level of the

initiative and at the Center level – building on a revised theory of change and a revised results framework. Both will be approved by the Governance Body that is to take on the role of the current Board (details see below) in early 2015, following appropriate consultations and discussions.

**Recommendation 2:** For the duration of the CLEAR experiment to 2018, the CLEAR Board should limit management and governance changes to those that will help transform the CLEAR programme into a strategically poised, learning initiative. The CLEAR Board should approve the establishment of an advisory committee and the appointment of a senior advisor to oversee the proposed transformation of the CLEAR programme into a learning initiative (p. 102 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the rationale underlying the recommendation and will focus changes in governance and management on those supporting the transformation towards a learning initiative. We also agree with the recommendation to add expertise to support the proposed transformation.** The format for adding such expertise, through a separate committee, a senior advisor, or senior staff, will be driven by practicality and business opportunity. We will also take concrete measures to integrate the learning agenda more profoundly within the DNA of the CLEAR initiative overall - through standard business processes as well as through the governance and management structures. **Profound governance and management changes are already underway** that will support the transformation of the CLEAR program into a learning and delivery initiative. These changes include, amongst others:

- *Including all CLEAR stakeholders that have interest in the learning agenda into the governance structure.* The current Board will be replaced, by early 2015, by a Governance Body that will include all Centers, as well as all key donors (above a specific contribution threshold), and IEG (in its role as the Chair of the Governance Body and the host of the Secretariat/Global Resource Team). The new governance body will focus on strategic vision, knowledge mobilization, and annual oversight; it will not have a role as operational as the current Board. The broadening of membership is to strengthen ownership and commitment to CLEAR's global learning agenda. This decision was taken at the CLEAR Board meeting on July 9, 2014.
- *The Board's Chair taking on a stronger leadership role and strategic and operational oversight specifically with regard to the knowledge and learning agenda.* This decision will be revisited by the new Governance Body in the second half of 2015. This decision was taken at the CLEAR Board meeting on July 9, 2014.
- *Expanding the new Governance Body's expertise base.* On an as-needed basis, the new Governance Body will invite thought leaders in the fields of organizational learning and knowledge management and evaluation to join their deliberations, advise on key technical matters, and challenge and stimulate the members of the Governance Body.

**Further structural changes to oversee the proposed transformation into a learning initiative are indeed needed.** Decisive and visible steps will be necessary to drive a change agenda across the CLEAR initiative as substantial as the change from a “delivery initiative” to a “learning and delivery initiative” focused on developing knowledge as well as on delivering evaluation capacity building. For such a

transformation to take place, the full and continued ownership of all participating Centers will be needed, as well as a compact between them, the donors and the Global Resource Team to systematically and jointly drive the new agenda. This will be achieved by:

- *Building and using new performance management framework on a revised theory of change and results framework that will explicitly incorporate the learning nature of the initiative.*
- *Establishing business processes that will draw attention to and drive decisions about progress (to be) made in generating learnings about evaluation capacity building, as part of the overall CLEAR management structure.*
- *Assigning explicit accountability to the Global Resource Team and to the Centers to support the creation, harvesting and deployment of learnings.* Working both at the Center and the program levels, the Global Resource Team will engage pro-actively in strengthening knowledge sharing and knowledge deployment in a systematic and regular form.

**Decision:** The CLEAR Board sees CLEAR as an initiative with both “experimental” element and “delivery to scale” element based on existing good practice and the evidence base of what works. Thus, the CLEAR Board will put in place governance and management changes that will help transform the CLEAR program into a strategically poised, learning and delivery initiative. The CLEAR Board will approve a new governance structure and a new performance management framework and standardized business processes, based on a revised theory or change, that are to drive the proposed transformation of the CLEAR program into a stronger learning and delivery initiative. In addition, the Global Resource Team will be assigned to take on specific accountabilities for facilitating the creation, sharing and deployment and uptake of learning for evaluation capacity building.

**Recommendation 3:** The CLEAR Board should assume a more strategic role in the future, deferring more operational considerations to the CLEAR Secretariat (p. 103 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the recommendation.** Beyond deferring operational decisions to the CLEAR Secretariat, we have also asked our Chair to step up and take a stronger leadership role, moving the CLEAR Secretariat’s towards a strong Global Resource Team working on operational program delivery as well as in knowledge management and learning.

The CLEAR initiative’s current Board will - in its new incarnation including donor members as well as Centers – focus primarily on strategy setting and annual program review. Funding allocation decisions will be taken by a donor-only “funding committee” (Please also see our response to Recommendation 2).

**Decision:** The CLEAR Board will – in its new and broader incarnation - assume a more strategic role in the future, deferring more operational considerations to its Chair (for decision making) and to the CLEAR Secretariat (for proposals and delivery).

**Recommendation 4:** The CLEAR Board should not consider any further expansion into new regions between now and 2018, and instead focus its efforts and resources on consolidating the learning taking place in the current CLEAR centres (p. 103 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the recommendation to focus efforts and resources on consolidating the learning taking place in the current CLEAR Centers.**

**We do not agree with the recommendation not to consider any further expansion between now and 2018.**

There are currently no concrete plans to add a new Center to the CLEAR family. Any such decision will be considered carefully in light of available resources, staff time, and management attention. The evaluation capacity field is highly active at this point in time – reflecting renewed interests across many governments and the private sector in monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs, also in the context of the post 2015 agenda. The Board therefore wishes to remain open to the possibility of adding CLEAR centers to the program, where this is strategically opportune in supporting the learning agenda as well as feasible in terms of resources, staff time and management attention.

**Decision:** The CLEAR Board will focus its efforts and resources on consolidating the learning taking place in the current CLEAR Centers. The Board may also consider further expansion between now and 2018, if this was to be strategically opportune in supporting the learning agenda as well as feasible in terms of resources and capacity.

**Recommendation 5:** All CLEAR centres should establish and operationalise Regional Advisory Committees (RAC) by December 2014 (p. 104 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with rationale underlying the recommendation – that it is important for a CLEAR Center to be well linked in with the local and regional fabric of experts and policy makers interested in and supportive of the evaluation capacity agenda. Such links can positively reinforce the quality of a Center’s deliverables, support its management, provide critical contact points with key organizations, and mobilize political insight and support.**

**We do not agree with the specific solution proposed: that all CLEAR Centers be required to establish a Regional Advisory Center (RAC). We also do not agree with the time-line set for December 2014.**

The mid-term evaluation points to a critical element of a CLEAR Center’s success: to have access to and benefit from strategic guidance, from connections and networks, from insights on specific M&E issues, and so on, provided by regionally and locally *grounded* thought leaders, policy makers and others interested in and supportive of the evaluation capacity agenda. The mid-term evaluation also points to the highly contextualized nature of the evaluation capacity agenda, noting that each CLEAR Center needs to build its strategy, tactics and work program around its very specific authorizing environment, opportunities, resources and capacities already available and emerging. We therefore do not see any value in prescribing a local governance structure such as the establishment of a Regional Advisory

Committee. In remaining with the recommendation's rationale, CLEAR Centers will identify a clear approach that will allow them to access the guidance, connections and networks, and insights needed to mobilize interest in and deliver highly performing and impactful evaluation capacity services. This will allow each Center to determine the process most suited and cost-effective for its own context.

The recommendation's timing – December 2014 – is not practical given the timing of the evaluation itself (completed in October 2014). Mobilizing high-level thought leaders and proponents of evaluation capacity within three months only to join a formal committee (or something equivalent) would lead to having to compromise on the level and quality of the individuals approached. However, setting time-boundaries for the establishment of a locally appropriate approach to access and mobilize such individuals is appropriate. Instead of three months, we will require 12 months (from the day of publishing the management response, or from the day of a Center becoming operational, whichever leads to the later date) as the appropriate time frame.

**Decision:** All CLEAR Centers will have established a clear and systematic approach to access local or regional thought leaders to guide their work within 12 months of a Center becoming operational or within 12 months of the publication of this management response, whichever leads to the later date.

**Recommendation 6:** Each CLEAR centre should develop a centre-specific theory of change (or at least elements of such a theory) to clarify key ideas and assumptions on the purpose, priorities, and envisaged results of the centre. Theories of change (ToCs) may differ in their format and level of elaboration, depending on existing centre capacity (p. 104 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the recommendation insofar as it stipulates the need to adjust the Centers' theories of change to reflect the contexts in which they work and the specific results they expect to achieve. We do not agree with the notion that theories of change should differ in their format and level of elaboration, depending on existing Center capacity.**

Formulating a theory of change that appropriately reflects and guides a Center's strategy, tactics and work program is a core competency for any organization that is part of CLEAR and works to build evaluation capacity. Therefore Centers' theories should not differ in their format or level of elaboration based on their existing capacity. Given the Centers' very different circumstances, each will have to develop their own and localized strategy, tactics and work program. They will deliver different results – working with different clients, different numbers of countries, and achieving different levels of change, all of which will be reflective of varying baseline conditions and contexts. However, in order to be effective in driving cross-regional knowledge sharing and global learning about what works and what does not work in evaluation capacity building, Centers will need a common language and frame of reference, and a shared theory of change framework. Based on the experiences of the different Centers in the past years, we believe such a common framework to be feasible and practical. The CLEAR Board, the CLEAR Centers and the Global Resource Team have already jointly embarked on revising a CLEAR-wide *theory of change framework*, establishing the overall objectives as well as key elements of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Within this framework and with core definitions – which are to be deployed by each Center as well as globally - Centers and the Global Resource Team are now being



asked to develop and clarify their context-specific assumptions, risks, and specific objectives and targets that are to underpin the individual elements of the theory of change.

**Decision:** Each CLEAR Center should develop a center-specific theory of change, aligned with and building on the CLEAR-wide agreed upon theory of change framework. The framework is to clarify key ideas and assumptions on the strategies and mechanisms deployed for delivering towards purpose, priorities, and envisaged results, which will vary in scope across the Centers. The Global Resource team will also develop a program-wide theory of change, equally building on the same framework.

**Recommendation 7:** Until 2018, the CLEAR Board should approve support for CLEAR centres' growth and development and engagement in the CLEAR initiative as long as their strategies and plans are congruent with and add value to CLEAR's learning and development objectives (p. 105 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the recommendation, with qualification.**

We agree that the Board (or its successor Governance Body) should approve support for the Centers' growth and development. Such approvals should come on the basis of (i) strategies and plans, congruent with and adding value to CLEAR's learning, development, and delivery objectives; and (ii) past track record in delivering on strategically set targets, as per agreed upon performance criteria, within the framework of the overall theory of change and each Center's and the global strategy.

**Decision:** Until 2018, the CLEAR Governance Body that will take financial decisions will allocate funding towards supporting the CLEAR Centers' growth and development, and towards engagement in the CLEAR initiative, as long as (i) a Center's strategies and plans are congruent with and add value to CLEAR's learning, delivery, and development objectives, within the agreed upon theory of change framework; and (ii) a Center's track record in delivering on strategically set targets is within the framework of the CLEAR theory of change, the Center's and the global strategy and related agreed upon performance expectations.

**Recommendation 8:** The CLEAR Secretariat should reformulate the global learning component and develop an explicit strategy for the Board's approval (p. 105 of the Final Evaluation Report).

**We agree with the recommendation.**

**Decision:** The CLEAR Secretariat/Global Resource Team will develop the program's global learning component based on an explicit strategy, with input from and in consultation with the CLEAR Centers. The strategy proposal will be presented to the CLEAR Board (or its new Governance Body) in early 2015. Delivery on the strategy will rest on the Global Resource Team as well as on contributions and behaviors expected from the CLEAR Centers.

**Table 1: Summary of Recommendations, Responses, and Decisions**

Recommendation	Response	Decisions with Timeline	Accountability for Decisions and/or Implementation
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> Decide if CLEAR is an experiment</p>	<p>Agree with the recommendation</p>	<p>To be completed in early 2015:  Develop a set of learning questions that CLEAR seeks to answer  Develop the types of information that it will be monitored at the level of the initiative and at the Center level – building on a revised theory of change and a revised results framework</p>	<p>The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to approve the learning questions, the revised theory of change, and the results framework.  CLEAR Centers and the Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) to implement after approval  The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to review progress</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Limit management and governance changes to those that will help transform the CLEAR programme into a learning initiative</p>	<p>Agree with rationale underlying the recommendations</p>	<p>For the duration of CLEAR to 2018, the CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) will put in place governance and management changes that will help transform CLEAR into a strategically poised, learning and delivery initiative  By December 2015: Develop and institute a new governance structure  By early 2015: develop and implement a performance management framework and standardized business processes, based on a revised theory of change, that are to drive the proposed transformation of the CLEAR program into a learning and delivery initiative. In addition, the Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) will be assigned to take on specific accountabilities for facilitating the creation, sharing and deployment and uptake of</p>	<p>The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to approve changes in governance structure  The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to approve revised theory of change and indicators to drive performance management  The Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) to develop the performance management system in consultation with the Centers  All CLEAR structures to use the performance management system  The Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) to implement the learning and knowledge sharing agenda</p>

		learning for evaluation capacity building	
<b>Recommendation 3:</b> CLEAR Board should assume a more strategic role	Agree with the recommendation	To be completed by January 2015: The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) will – in its new and broader incarnation - assume a more strategic role in the future, deferring more operational considerations to its Chair (for decision making) and to the Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) (for proposals and delivery)	The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to approve
<b>Recommendation 4:</b> No expansion into new regions  Focus its efforts and resources on consolidating the learning	Agree with the recommendation to focus efforts and resources on consolidating the learning, but not The recommendation not to consider any further expansion	The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) will focus its efforts and resources on consolidating the learning taking place in the current CLEAR centers. The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) will also consider any further expansion between now and 2018, if this was to be strategically opportune in supporting the learning agenda as well as feasible in terms of resources and capacity	The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to review on a periodic basis
<b>Recommendation 5:</b> Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) to be established	Agree with rationale underlying recommendation but not the specific solution proposed	Within 12 months of a Center becoming operational or within 12 months of the publication of this management response: All CLEAR Centers will have established a clear and systematic approach to access local or regional thought leaders to guide their work	CLEAR Centers to develop and implement
<b>Recommendation 6:</b> Center-specific theory of change	Agree with the recommendation, with qualification	To be completed by May 2015: Each CLEAR Center should develop a Center-specific theory of change, aligned with and building on the CLEAR-wide agreed upon theory of change framework. The Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) should also develop	CLEAR Centers to develop and use  The Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) to develop and use

		a program-wide theory of change, equally building on the same framework	
<b>Recommendation 7:</b> Board to approve centers' growth and development	Agree with the recommendation, with qualification	Ongoing: Until 2018, the CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) that will take financial decisions will approve support for CLEAR Centers' growth and development, and for engagement in the CLEAR initiative, as long as (i) a Center's strategies and plans are congruent with and add value to CLEAR's learning, delivery, and development objectives, within the agreed upon theory of change framework; and (ii) a Center's track record in delivering on strategically set targets is within the framework of the CLEAR theory of change and the Center's and the global strategy	The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to decide
<b>Recommendation 8:</b> Secretariat to reformulate global learning component	Agree with the recommendation	To be completed early in 2015: Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) will develop the program's global learning component based on an explicit strategy, with input from and in consultation with the CLEAR Centers. The strategy proposal will be presented to the CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) in early 2015. Delivery on the strategy will rest on the Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) as well as on contributions and behaviors expected from the CLEAR Centers	The Global Resource Team (today: the Secretariat) to develop  The CLEAR Governance Body (today: the Board) to approve