

# Initial evaluation of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors

**Evaluation brief**  
**2019**

## Context of the evaluation

WHO's engagement with non-State actors supports the implementation of the Organization's policies and recommendations at global, regional and country levels as decided by the governing bodies, as well as the application of WHO's technical norms and standards. The sixty-ninth World Health Assembly, in resolution WHA69.10 (2016), adopted the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA). The FENSA endeavors to strengthen WHO's engagement with non-State actors while protecting its work from potential hazards such as conflict of interest, reputational risks, and undue influence.

## Objectives and scope of the evaluation

This Initial evaluation of the implementation of the FENSA covers the period from May 2016 to and May 2019. The evaluation covers the implementation of the Framework across all levels of the Organization.

The main objectives of the evaluation are to:

- assess the status of implementation of the FENSA;
- assess its impact on the work of the Organization;
- identify enabling and constraining factors affecting results achieved; and
- make recommendations, as appropriate, on the way forward to enable the full, coherent and consistent implementation of the Framework.

## Key findings and conclusions

### Theme 1: Relevance

The FENSA constitutes a coherent and integrated framework compared to previous policies. However, a comprehensive, actionable strategy and associated implementation plan to achieve the overall aims of the FENSA at all three levels of the Organization is absent.

This lack of an overarching engagement strategy – comprised of specific, concrete actions to situate the FENSA as a framework and translate its broad goals into a concrete, actionable and well-phased plan to guide the Organization's engagement – represents a significant gap. Consequently, downstream actions to implement the FENSA have been fragmented and not supported by a coherent communication and information dissemination strategy.

### Theme 2: Efficiency

Despite the lack of an overarching strategy, WHO has succeeded in initiating (if not completing) implementation on all aspects required by resolution WHA69.10. However, these outputs and achievements have been undertaken in an ad hoc, fragmented and unsystematic manner across the Organization, and implementation was not sufficiently resourced.

Limited progress has been made in other important areas, such as: full functionality of the Register of non-State actors with the inclusion of all non-State actors; coordinated staff training across all three levels of the Organization; the development of electronic workflows on the now-paused Global Engagement Management system, and the regular and active involvement of the FENSA Proposal Review Committee, which has convened infrequently.

Owing to WHO's dynamic organizational context, some activities and outputs are now in need of further iteration, development or supporting actions.

While recognizing the achievement of short-term results of implementation activities and outputs, sequencing and delivery delays have affected the achievement of coherent, consistent implementation of the FENSA across all three levels of WHO, thereby limiting broader achievement of targeted outcomes.

A lack of resources was cited as being a significant constraint to implementation across the Organization. In addition, no financial monitoring of the explicit or hidden costs of implementation has taken place.

### Theme 3: Effectiveness

A significant majority internal and external stakeholders feels the FENSA has been successful in achieving its immediate objectives to at least some extent. They believe that the FENSA has brought greater coherence and consistency to WHO's engagements. However, implementation planning and roll-out has been insufficiently coordinated or integrated across the Organization, resulting in inconsistent application of the FENSA, and although the Framework has contributed to demystifying the principles of WHO's engagements, this inconsistent implementation and the shortcomings of the Register

of non-State actors have engendered negative perceptions related to transparency.

The FENSA has to some extent encouraged WHO staff and non-State actors to think more strategically about their engagement, especially when entering into official relations. It is likely that the FENSA has, by design, protected WHO from engaging with non-State actors that could jeopardize the credibility of its work. At the same time, there is a sense among some stakeholders that the FENSA has amplified organizational risk aversiveness, such that the Framework might inadvertently be preventing otherwise positive engagements from occurring.

### **Theme 4: Conditions for impact and sustainability**

Despite the gaps and areas for improvement cited in the evaluation report, the conditions for future impact and sustainability otherwise appear to be in place.

It is noted that the FENSA yields mutual benefit for stakeholders; that it is easier to engage with non-State actors under the FENSA; and that it has clarified how to work with non-State actors at country, regional and global levels. At the same time, the burden of FENSA implementation is being significantly felt, posing potential risks to its future impact and sustainability.

### **Theme 5: Coherence**

FENSA implementation is an institutional responsibility. However, interviewed stakeholders note that the implementation of FENSA cannot become an institutional responsibility if people are not aware of it; and that it has been challenging to create that awareness without consistent corporate backing and resources to consistently train. There is an appreciation that implementation of FENSA is not only the responsibility of the specialized unit.

## **Lessons learned**

WHO has striven to implement the FENSA and has made considerable strides in most key mandated areas toward this end, this despite several factors affecting its ability to do so fully. Although the enabling conditions for future impact and sustainability otherwise appear to be in place, action to address key gaps will help maximize the likelihood that implementation will be as successful moving forward.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1: Enhance internal and external communication on the FENSA** to raise awareness of the practicalities of FENSA implementation, with the aim of improving buy-in and ensuring more consistent application. Communications should be coordinated and multi-channel to ensure coverage, consistent messaging in order to demystify the FENSA and address

persistent “myths”, supported by effective signposting to existing materials.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen understanding, ownership and management of risks and benefits of engagement** to further mainstream and “stabilize” the application of the FENSA. This includes: a fully-costed training plan, supported by sufficient human and financial resources; updates of guides, guidances and handbooks; clarity on simplified procedures; and electronic workflows and the full establishment of the Register of non-State actors.

**Recommendation 3: Enhance access to specialized knowledge and apply expert technical advice** through several existing mechanisms that need further strengthening or revitalizing, including the FENSA focal points and the FENSA Steering Committee, coupled with a clarification of the role and responsibilities of the specialized unit responsible for performing standard due diligence and risk assessment.

**Recommendation 4: Strengthen the data environment by establishing a systematic monitoring and tracking mechanism** in order to ensure both accountability and ongoing learning and improvement.

**Recommendation 5: Enhance learning**, which might include: (a) a learning exchange, facilitated by the FENSA focal points network; (b) identification and dissemination of unique/innovative applications of the FENSA on a precedent/case study basis (through the FENSA Proposal Review Committee); and (c) annual synthesis circulated to all staff (as part of the communication strategy described above).

**Recommendation 6: Develop, finalize and implement an engagement strategy with non-State actors.** The strategy should help senior management to amplify the Organization’s maturing position on engagements between WHO and non-State actors; sharpen congruence between what is espoused and what is enacted and ensure that staff have a constructive yet risk-aware approach towards engagement; be relevant and applicable across the three levels of the Organization; include the designation of a senior-level steward to oversee implementation of the FENSA.

## **Contacts**

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The evaluation report is available here: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/evaluation/fensa-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=c62a32c5\\_8](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/evaluation/fensa-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=c62a32c5_8)