



Interview: Susanne Frueh, former Joint Inspection Unit Executive Secretary

This article is part of an ongoing series to commemorate the Joint Inspection Unit's 50th anniversary and highlight the JIU's work and achievements over the last 50 years.

How would you assess your experience in the JIU from a professional perspective?

My five years (2009-2014) in the JIU have been a strong and formative professional learning experience, providing me with technical and diplomatic skills and knowledge that I benefit from in my current position. In particular, the JIU's bird's eye view of the entire United Nations system gave me a unique perspective of what is being done in key areas of work by key actors in the UN.

What major changes in the Unit have you witnessed during your term as Executive Secretary?

The JIU continued on a strong path of professionalization which had started before I came on board. In a team effort the JIU continued down this path and pushed through major change: streamlining working methods by refining the yard sticks and setting expectations; establishing norms and standards for evaluation, inspection and investigations which are all in line with the prevailing professional industry standards; developing the Web-Based Tracking System which now helps track systematically the uptake and implementation of JIU recommendations; increasing the resources the JIU could work with through a high quality internship programme; several associate experts provided by member states and over USD 1 million in extra-budgetary resources for specific JIU topics; a new look to the JIU website has made the work of the JIU more accessible and provides access to reports back to the founding days of the JIU as well as provides a more attractive and modern look. The JIU also went

through its second very reflective self-evaluation- this time with validation from a peer review panel.

In your opinion, what have been the Unit's main accomplishments in implementing its oversight mandate from a system-wide perspective?

As is often heard, the Unit is the only independent system-wide body with a system-wide mandate – keeping this mandate going is an achievement on its own. Each system-wide report provides insights into the entire UN system which is unique. The Statute, although crafted many years ago, provides a sound framework for the Unit's work.

From your perspective, what have been the major challenges for the Joint Inspection Unit in fulfilling its mandate by providing relevant, useful and timely system-wide independent oversight?

The JIU at times has been too distant from its clients and not all clients understand the real value of the work of the JIU and do not always see the Unit as a tool for improving existing practice. The timeliness of reports has also at times been critiqued and the Statute which was a ground breaking document when developed does reflect older business models



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2009-2014

and practices, including the way reports are being circulated and commented on. The system has grown manifold but the JIU's resources have remained stagnant in terms of staff positions and inspectors and significantly reduced concerning non-staff resources. This limits the JIU's ability to address more complex tasks and to cover also the UN's work in the field. At the same time there is an obvious need for better system-wide oversight and learning.

The adoption of Agenda 2030 provides many opportunities in this regard. One also needs to recognize that over the years other mechanisms have been established so the space has become more crowded although not necessarily on a system-wide basis. JIU needs to convince its partners that it has the capacity to play the role given to it by its mandate. Another challenge I see is knowledge management.

“The JIU needs a fresh outlook and to develop a forward looking strategic vision”

While inspectors and staff seem to stay longer on average in their positions than in other UN functions, the teams move from topic to topic instead of building up expertise in a certain area – and, once the team leader or staff is gone with him/her the expertise is gone too.

Based on your personal experience, what are the areas to which the JIU has contributed most significantly in improving the performance of the UN system?

The suite of oversight reports have had the strongest impact, starting with the oversight lacunae report in 2006, followed by specific reports on internal audit, evaluation, investigations, ethics, accountability frameworks, ombudsmen, transparency, RBM, enterprise risk management, fraud awareness; they have shaped the UN's oversight policies and functions. Many of these reports remain key reference documents and have contributed to strengthening oversight all around and they have set well recognized benchmarks for the system. The JIU has been able to pick other salient topics also in programmatic areas. One of the great value of the reports is to see what the

rest of the system is doing and building on that. The Management & Administration reports of individual agencies have had a certain impact – if they are embraced by member states and management alike they have led to positive change. At the same time they allow drilling down on some of the system-wide issues in more detail enriching future system-wide reports.

What changes have you observed in the way that the Unit has been interacting with its stakeholders?

The biennium focal point meeting confirms a greater desire to reach out and listen to stakeholders. The development of the independent system-wide evaluation policy (ISWE) is another opportunity to change the way the JIU interacts with stakeholders as it is based on the principle of partnership among the key stakeholders. Therefore, increasingly more emphasis is placed on the process of preparing the report (better stakeholder engagement) than on the final product. This approach will eventually enhance the utility of JIU reports.

In which way would you like to see the JIU evolve in the period up to 2030?

The JIU needs a fresh outlook and to develop a forward looking strategic vision for its support for a stronger and more effective UN system to implement Agenda 2030. This requires to continue to explore further changes of the business model of the Unit: by engaging more with key stakeholders; increasing the JIU's visibility; investing in the capacities of both inspectors and staff; creating one team; using more foresight in choosing topics that will make their mark at the right time; and developing more flexible, innovative and agile approaches to dealing with system-wide topics. Members of the JIU - and this includes of course the staff - should become more proactive in intergovernmental, interagency and professional fora to share their expertise and knowledge. The systematic development of key performance indicators for certain areas of work would also be of great benefit to the system. Finally, it may be possible to think of developing various streams/areas of practice – e.g. system-wide business processes, system-wide programmatic evaluation etc. each with an empowered lead and accountabilities, etc.

*}} Enhancing efficiency, effectiveness,
accountability and transparency across
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