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Population Fund and the United
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Evaluation

Annual report on evaluation, 2019

Summary

In this annual report on evaluation for 2019, the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP presents the status of key initiatives during 2019 and looks at progress to date in applying the evaluation principles of independence, credibility and utility associated with the professionalization of the Independent Evaluation Office. The report also includes an end-of-term report by the outgoing Director of the Independent Evaluation Office for the period 2012 to 2020.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of the annual report; and (b) request UNDP to address the issues raised.

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* Reissued owing to the impact of COVID-19 on meetings.

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Director's full-term report, 2012 to 2020

1. As part of the annual report on evaluation for 2019, this full-term report provides an overview of key changes that occurred during three phases of the evolution of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) during the term of the Director (2012-2020). These changes include; (a) the change of the evaluation model from 2012; (b) the commitment of the Administrator to full coverage and an increased IEO budget; and (c) the revised evaluation policy and regional/global expansion of evaluation within UNDP.

A. Phase 1: change of the evaluation model, 2012

2. At the time of the Director's appointment in 2012, the Evaluation Office¹ had a solid foundation established by his predecessor in terms of addressing evaluation imperatives and principles. The Director's assessment of the evaluation context and needs of UNDP as a key development agency working in complex contexts with resource challenges meant that the profile and outputs of the Evaluation Office needed to be escalated in terms of scope and depth to optimize the impact of evaluation and better guide the organization.

3. For evaluation to have an impact in an international organization the size of UNDP, there must be adequate evaluation coverage to justify expenditure and to produce credible findings, conclusions and recommendations and provide statistically valid samples to make any generalizations about performance reliable in answering "big picture" questions.

4. The dominant approach in the office at that time was largely to manage a process of commissioning evaluations from external parties. This was not adequate to meet the evaluative demands of an organization of the size and complexity of UNDP, which requires greater capturing, integration and use of knowledge for organizational learning and improvement. Equally, it was not adequate to support the building of a critical evaluation culture in which the value of evaluations for learning and improvement is seen by all parties. The commissioning model does not provide a sustainable model for coherent and uniform exercise of independent evaluation, necessary for the credibility of the function. Several organizational changes were necessary to raise the status of the function, ranging from policy to evaluation guidelines, as well as an improvement of the office's relationship with programme countries, the Executive Board and UNDP management.

5. It was in this context that the office began a process of professionalization through the introduction of an evaluation-conduct model, whereby IEO evaluations are led by IEO evaluators and not commissioned to external parties. This required several initiatives to embed the model, build confidence in the office and its products and create and sustain an evaluation culture to move evaluation from the periphery to the centre of the organization.

6. This period of change also saw greater demand and receptiveness for evaluations by Member States at both the country and Executive Board levels, as well as a greater move towards recognizing evaluations as useful in promoting learning, rather than as simply perfunctory and accountability-focused. Building on the existing team, the office began recruiting more widely to bring in a greater range of expertise and diversity, to project and enhance credibility by showing substantive understanding of the work under review and the context that influences it, developing a cadre of professional United Nations evaluators. A further key benefit of the change was reduced time and cost for individual evaluations, allowing for greater coverage within allocated budgets and for greater linkages between country programme evaluations and thematic and corporate evaluations.

7. A key element of professionalization is a structure of technical and methodological support which was brought to the office through the establishment of the Evaluation Advisory Panel, comprised of prominent peers from within the global evaluation community. The members of the panel have provided their thoughts, reflections and advice on more than 200 IEO outputs over their term and engaged in six annual meetings, providing opportunities for the IEO team to partner with evaluation thought leaders, in turn raising the quality of evaluative thinking within the office and bringing in new global perspectives to its development evaluation practices. .

¹ The office was renamed the Independent Evaluation as of 2014.

B. Phase 2: 2016, commitment of the Administrator to full coverage and increased budget

8. The Executive Board, as custodian of the evaluation policy, played an important role in promoting the office and its work. In 2016, based on an earlier review, the Board adopted a revised evaluation policy. At the same time, it was announced that IEO would undertake full evaluation coverage of all country programmes reaching their conclusion, a five-fold increase in output that required the office to undertake further internal reflection in order to meet this obligation, evaluate at a higher scale and with a larger portfolio of the UNDP programmatic budget, and conduct evaluations within shorter time frames without compromising engagement and quality. This was achieved and the office now has accumulated an evaluative base for examining the strategic impact of the overarching UNDP policies and vision, allowing for more evidence-rich corporate and thematic evaluations. This has provided strong information for the forthcoming evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. Full coverage also required an internal reorganization in the form of new protocols, the Evaluation Charter and new guidelines, all of which have entrenched evaluation as a part of the organizational reality, not separate to it.

C. Phase 3: 2019 evaluation policy and IEO global/regional expansion

9. These changes and progression have been codified in the 2019 evaluation policy, with the work of the office chosen as an international case study by the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET), and have pivoted the work of UNDP as a leader in the United Nations evaluation system. Going forward, the new director will need to continue these developments, bringing greater support to decentralized evaluation and national evaluation capacities in support of Governments in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. IEO in 2020 can be characterized as follows:

- (a) A leading evaluation office in the United Nations system, with one of the highest geographic spans and coverage of programming, an annual budget of \$14.7 million and a staff of 34;
- (b) A policy foundation has been laid for further geographic expansion and focus of IEO, supporting evaluation needs in relation to organizational and United Nations priorities and building on the pivotal IEO national evaluation capacity conferences;
- (c) A highly principled and robust evaluation policy, noted for its adherence to independence, credibility and utility, as affirmed in the independent 2019 policy review and both statements by delegations at Executive Board sessions the Board's formal decisions on the annual report on evaluation;
- (d) A mature and full office management structure, including chiefs of sections, delegation of authorities and protocols and staff drawn from a rich global evaluation network, reflecting sectoral and national diversity and evaluation experience;
- (e) Full programme coverage resulting in a high repository of evaluation work, with over 100 independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs), 25 thematic evaluations and various papers forming the basis for evaluative commentary;
- (f) A global presence, with the office's work presented globally at key evaluation events, providing thought leadership and demonstrating the value of evaluation for development, transparency, learning and accountability. IEO is recognized for its expertise with its participation as a trainer at IPDET, a first for the United Nations system;
- (g) The IEO is partnering with the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank on a global evaluation capacity development initiative, affirming its recognized quality and capacity.

I. Introduction

11. This annual report on evaluation details the work undertaken by IEO in 2019, which included 38 ICPEs and preparatory work for a number of thematic evaluations, as well as the office's work to strengthen the evaluation function across UNDP and with country partners.

A. Evaluation policy review and revised evaluation policy, 2019

12. The IEO managed a review of the 2016 evaluation policy and its implementation, as requested by the Executive Board. An independent external panel of three senior evaluation experts undertook a detailed review of the policy, interviewing a range of stakeholders across UNDP, including the Administrator, bureau heads and staff and IEO management and staff. The review

examined the evaluative efforts of UNDP during the period from September 2016 to January 2019, taking into consideration contextual and organizational changes since the approval of the 2016 evaluation policy by the Executive Board.

13. Overall, the independent review provided a positive assessment of the 2016 evaluation policy and its implementation, while at the same time recommending opportunities for further improvement. In their report, the policy review team set out 11 recommendations concerning the UNDP evaluation policy principles, evaluation architecture, procedures and quality assurance, which were discussed at an informal session of the Executive Board in May 2019 (DP/2019/13). IEO and UNDP management considered the final policy review and recommendations in detail and presented a joint response (DP/2019/14).

14. The evaluation policy review set the foundation for a revision of the 2016 evaluation policy, which was again jointly undertaken by IEO and UNDP management. The revised policy responds to 8 of the 11 recommendations suggested by the policy review team. The revised UNDP evaluation policy (DP/2019/29) was presented to and accepted by the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2019. The most significant change proposed was an increase in the percentage of resources reserved for the work of the IEO within the 1 per cent of combined programmatic resources (regular and other resources) allocated to the evaluation function on an annual basis. The policy sets an annual resource allocation to the IEO of 0.3 per cent of combined programmatic sources, a 50 per cent increase from the previous 0.2 per cent.

15. This revision responds to the policy review findings on the need for concerted action to improve the quality, independence and impartiality of the decentralized evaluation function, a concern consistently raised by the Executive Board. IEO has worked closely with UNDP in recent years to address these concerns and strengthen the guidance and oversight of the decentralized evaluation function, as detailed in this and previous annual reports.

16. While continuing such collaborative efforts with UNDP management, the increased budgetary allocation will enable a significant expansion of IEO oversight of the decentralized evaluation function and technical support and guidance to country offices in their planning and implementation of evaluations. To fulfil this additional role, the IEO will consider various options, including but not limited to building a cadre of IEO evaluation advisers at the regional level. The new approach will be taken up by the new Director from April 2020, who shall also reflect on other options to improve the impact of IEO within the context of addressing organizational priorities and United Nations reform imperatives.

17. Other revisions in the evaluation policy, while having less operational significance, are also very important. The evaluation principles now include explicit reference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to universally shared values of equity, justice, gender equality and respect for diversity. Finally, the new policy underscores the contribution of UNDP evaluations to system-wide accountability and learning, in recognition of new mandates emanating from the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and the Secretary General's United Nations development system reforms.

B. The Executive Board

18. The IEO continues to engage closely with the UNDP Executive Board as the custodian of the evaluation policy and in 2019 delivered evaluative and policy review findings at both informal and formal sessions. The ICPE reports now accompany all new country programme documents (CPDs) submitted to the Board. This has been possible only through the 100 per cent coverage outlined further in this report. The major policy developments in 2019 were:

- (a) First regular session 2019. Presentation of the evaluation of UNDP support to poverty reduction in the least developed countries;
- (b) Annual session 2019. Annual report on evaluation 2018 and UNDP evaluation policy review;
- (c) Second regular session 2019. Presentation and adoption of the revised UNDP evaluation policy.

C. Evaluation Advisory Panel

19. The Evaluation Advisory Panel was in its sixth year of supporting the IEO in 2019, providing critical guidance and intellectual insight into the work of the IEO to strengthen its production of

high-quality evaluations. The panel has helped IEO to improve the quality of its evaluations, increase its evaluative competencies and deepen its role in evaluation within UNDP and externally. The panel's 2019 annual meeting focused on reviewing the last six years of support and the capturing of lessons from this time; a review of the country programme evaluation approach and discussion of corporate and thematic evaluations completed in the year and those in development; the independent review of the UNDP evaluation policy; and a detailed discussion on the possible future of focus and role of the panel.

D. Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee

20. The IEO has continued to engage with the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee, with the IEO Director presenting the office's work three times in 2019. The committee is charged with reviewing the activities of the UNDP oversight entities, including the IEO, the Office of Audit and Investigation and the Ethics Office, which are increasingly harmonizing their work. It is an organizational advisory function to the IEO Director and does not impact or undermine the principle of independence and accountability to the Executive Board. The policy review of 2019 provides perspectives on this element.

E. Engagement with regional bureaux

21. During 2019, IEO organized meetings with senior managers of the five UNDP regional bureaux to take stock of its evaluations and discuss its current and upcoming work in the different regions. The office presented a number of the key issues drawn from recent ICPEs and shared the IEO evaluation plan for the 2020-2021 cycles, including;

- (a) Diverse development contexts across and within regions. Bureau-level strategies are needed to support operations across differing contexts and quickly evolving environments. More attention is needed to emerging issues (e.g., crisis);
- (b) Low-income countries. Capacity development efforts need to be strengthened. There has been limited knowledge/technical capacity transfer under the national implementation mode. There is limited evidence of impact from poverty reduction activities;
- (c) Middle-income countries. A declining donor base has accompanied increasing reliance on government cost sharing and vertical funds. Greater diversification of funds should include innovative financing. Other priorities comprise a balance between government cost-sharing goals and the values and strategic goals of the United Nations and UNDP (e.g., human rights and equality) and clarity in the UNDP role and offer to middle-income countries. UNDP could facilitate South-South cooperation using its global presence;
- (d) Net contributor countries. This context requires a different UNDP offer. UNDP should articulate its role and added value in delivering government-funded/-driven programmes and forge strong partnerships with civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and donors;
- (e) Programme design. There is a need for greater flexibility in programming and decision-making (e.g., the CPD as a strategic framework versus a "bridging programme" for post-conflict stabilization). More attention needs to go towards poverty and youth issues. More risk analysis is required;
- (f) Strengthen results-based management practices. Challenges include limited use of theories of change or strategic frameworks to guide programmes. Large claims in results-oriented annual reporting cannot be substantiated. Programme units need to be measured against actual results rather than financial delivery;
- (g) Declining financial resources. In low-income countries, there is overreliance on TRAC (and vertical funds) and little leverage of funds using TRAC, with a lack of strategic choices in the allocation of human and financial resources. Funding sources need more diversification (e.g., government cost sharing, the private sector);
- (h) Role of headquarters/regional hubs. Country offices need more external support (e.g., thematic guidance) and early and full engagement of the regional bureaux for timely guidance;
- (i) UNDP partnerships. UNDP is seen as a valuable, trusted partner, with international expertise and networks and an ability to respond swiftly to needs. A balance is needed between administrative services supporting Governments and substantive programmes,

especially in terms of government cost sharing in middle-income countries and net contributor countries.

- (j) Redefining the role of UNDP. There have been challenges in redefining the UNDP role in programme countries since the delinking of the resident coordinator system. This requires better delineation of the UNDP role as an “integrator” (vis-à-vis the resident coordinator) and “convener” role.

II. Key evaluations undertaken in 2019

22. The year was an extremely busy evaluative year for the IEO with all staff engaged in country programme evaluations and with several key and highly important corporate evaluations starting their preliminary design and desk reviews.

A. Independent country programme evaluations

23. In 2019, 38 ICPEs were carried out, covering \$6.4 billion of the UNDP programme budget, compared to 14 ICPEs and \$1.9 billion in 2018. IEO plans to have all the ICPEs ready to accompany all CPD submissions to the Executive Board in 2020, to aid and inform the Board’s consideration of new CPDs. To use resources efficiently and take into account geographical positioning and similarities in programme implementation, a number of country programme evaluations were undertaken through combined data collection missions (Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles; Eswatini and Zimbabwe) or were implemented through a cluster approach (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan).

24. Country programme evaluations in 2019 included 11 in Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Uganda, Zimbabwe); six in the Asia-Pacific region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives); five in the Arab States (Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic); 12 in Europe and the CIS (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as Kosovo)²; and four in Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, El Salvador, Panama, Uruguay).

25. Both 2018 and 2019 saw evaluations of UNDP work in countries in crisis and post-crisis settings, including Afghanistan, 2019 (instability and protracted conflict); Burkina Faso, 2019 (increased localized conflict and accompanying humanitarian crisis); Iraq, 2019 (immediate post-conflict stage); Mali, 2018 (post-conflict, localized attacks); Somalia, 2019 (chronic instability and large-scale insurgency), Syrian Arab Republic, 2019 (post-conflict, localized active conflict); Venezuela, 2018; and Yemen, 2018 (conflict). Evaluations of programmes in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey in 2019 addressed support to humanitarian work due to the ongoing refugee crisis.

26. The findings of these evaluations have provided significant lessons for UNDP on both the need for and the approaches to undertaking evaluations in crisis and unstable settings, highlighting that evaluation is even more necessary in these arenas and can be done. A further lesson is that evaluations can be carried out in countries in crisis, but planning and partnerships are key to successful evaluations, and evaluators need to be patient and flexible and have access to additional resources given the greater complexity and security concerns. Lessons from these evaluations have further strengthened the work and future methodological approaches of IEO, especially in 2020 when it will evaluate UNDP work in a number of crisis-affected countries.

27. A further positive step has been the strengthening of linkages between country programme evaluations and the development of corporate thematic evaluations, with country programme evaluations for Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey, informing the corporate evaluation of UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response and promoting integrated resilience approaches to human migration.

28. Eleven ICPEs in Europe and the CIS were included in an ICPE cluster approach, allowing IEO to adopt a more cost-effective modus operandi. The 11 programmes all underwent individual evaluations that examined UNDP work at the country level during the ongoing programme cycle

² In the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

2016-2020. Results of the ICPEs will provide a set of forward-looking recommendations as input to the new country programme development processes and to inform regional strategies.

B. Corporate and thematic evaluations

Evaluation of UNDP support to poverty reduction in least developed countries: management response

29. The office presented its findings, conclusions and recommendations for its evaluation of UNDP support to poverty reduction in the least developed countries to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2019 (DP/2019/4). Due to the complexity of the evaluation and the detailed recommendations, UNDP presented an initial management note at that session and presented the full management response (DP/2019/17) to the Board at the annual session of 2019, in which management fully outlined its response and approach in addressing the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations.

Forthcoming: Evaluation of UNDP support to the Syrian refugee crisis response

30. The evaluation will assess the contribution of UNDP to the Syrian refugee response at the national level and to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, with an emphasis on the integrated resilience approach followed and promoted in the Syrian refugee response and the corporate learning in other human migration responses. The evaluation will build upon the ICPEs conducted in Iraq, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey in 2019, to provide in-depth insights on the UNDP engagement and contributions to the Syrian refugee response. The evaluation will contribute to strengthening the response and to the development of corporate programme strategies, policies on migration and displacement programming.

31. As the Syrian crisis enters its ninth year, the conflict's protracted nature, complexity, severity and scale have led to the largest refugee displacement in the world and massive humanitarian and development impacts. UNDP has supported a shift in approach towards resilience-building aimed to bridge the humanitarian-development divide. UNDP programmes aim to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable and support the respective Governments in coping, recovering and addressing the consequences of the influx of refugees. The evaluation will be presented to the Executive Board at the first regular session of 2021.

Forthcoming: Evaluation of the common chapter of the strategic plans of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women

32. In line with a request by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/243 of 21 December 2016 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, as well as the Secretary-General's reforms for the repositioning of the United Nations development system, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) have committed to working better together, with a view to achieving greater coherence in support of development results, which is embodied in a common chapter of their respective strategic plans for 2018-2021, which focused on six areas of collaboration and four approaches to strengthen their work together.

33. In 2019, the evaluation offices of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women began a joint evaluation of the common chapter, to provide an independent assessment of the progress and results achieved. This started with a baseline study and evaluability assessment (finalized February 2019) verifying the existence of basic evaluation parameters – such as the quality of design and data availability – and identified the extent to which the common chapter has changed how the four agencies work together in programme and operations to leverage results at country level. The initial plan was for a second phase to examine the modalities through which the four agencies have been working together, as well as with other United Nations partners, in the context of the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system, including the common chapter. At the 2020 annual sessions of the respective Executive Boards, a decision will be needed on whether to move forward.

Forthcoming: Evaluation of UNDP development cooperation in middle-income countries

34. The UNDP global strategic presence is predicated on the recognition that while there are obvious development challenges in least developed and crisis countries, most middle-income and high-income countries also have unfinished development agendas, including but not exclusively,

pockets of poverty and high spatial, income and gender inequality. The UNDP programme expenditures in the 83 middle-income countries where it operates amounted to over \$11.5 billion for the period 2014-2019, representing approximately 59 per cent of UNDP programme expenditures. Contributions from programme countries to projects in their own countries (government cost sharing) take on greater significance in middle-income countries although the amounts vary substantially by country.

35. This evaluation will: (a) assess the nature, type and scale of UNDP support to middle-income countries, considering their wide diversity of development conditions and needs; (b) assess the UNDP contribution to middle-income countries through key priority areas of support and within the scope of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals; and (c) identify the factors affecting the positioning and engagement of UNDP in middle-income countries, covering the first two years of the current UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 and the four years of the previous plan (2014-2017). The final evaluation is due for submission to the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2020.

Forthcoming: Evaluation of UNDP programming for climate resilience

36. “Signature Solution 3” in the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 emphasizes the importance of taking an integrated approach to helping countries address the risk of disasters and adapt to climate change. The UNDP strategy singles out countries that are highly exposed to hazards and slow-or rapid-onset crises as requiring a distinct form of support. UNDP work on climate resilience is defined through four interrelated areas of engagement: disaster risk reduction; climate change; disaster recovery; and sustainable energy. Activities across these four areas promote three major global agreements: the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The work of UNDP is funded at approximately \$250 million annually, up from \$182 million five years ago. A special focus of this evaluation will be on small island developing States, which include a group of 58 countries with particular social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

37. The objectives of the evaluation are to: (a) evaluate UNDP achievements and performance in addressing vulnerability of partner countries to increasing risks brought about by climate change; and (b) provide actionable recommendations for future UNDP strategic planning and programme implementation. The evaluation is due for submission to the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2020.

III. Advancing global evaluation culture and practice in 2019

38. IEO is committed to the strengthening of an evaluation culture globally, within UNDP, the United Nations and beyond, through work with a broad range of regional and global communities of practice including the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), as well as in support to national Governments engaged in developing evaluation capacities.

A. National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2019

39. In partnership with the Government of Egypt, the IEO organized the sixth National Evaluation Capacities Conference in Hurgada, Egypt. The 2019 conference brought together over 500 participants from 107 countries, around the theme, Leaving No One Behind: Evaluation for 2030. The conference was the sixth in a series of biennial conferences on national evaluation capacities to advance the use of evaluation to improve development effectiveness, which has become increasingly salient in the Sustainable Development Goal era.

40. Keynote speeches, plenary sessions and multiple side sessions revolved around an exploration of what “leaving no one behind” means for evaluation in light of the 2030 Agenda, which was a constant theme throughout the conference. Speakers pointed to the importance of asking, “why are we doing the evaluation? For whom?” and of engaging communities in evaluation to strengthen credibility and bring out the voices of the people. An important reflection was that, “data, and data collection, may be a challenge, but people are there, ready to tell their stories”. With respect to gender, it was found that despite progress, the evaluation community needs to collectively advocate for more gender-responsive evaluation. A further session shared six principles that should apply to evaluations to ensure that evaluation leaves no one behind, including the importance of mapping stakeholders at the outset of, and sustaining stakeholder engagement throughout, the evaluation processes.

41. The three days of vibrant exchanges and sharing of lessons learned, experiences, thoughts and ideas provided the 500-plus participants with new knowledge and renewed motivation and commitment to fostering evaluation that leaves no one behind and helps accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. This was complemented by two days of pre-conference training workshops during which 30 evaluation experts from around the world offered 21 different workshops in three languages to 280 participants from government, civil society, United Nations and other development partner agencies, with 97 per cent of participants stating they were satisfied with the quality and content of the conference.

B. International Program for Development Evaluation Training

42. The IPDET, founded in 2001, is a renowned executive training programme that aims to provide managers and practitioners in evaluation with the tools required to evaluate policies, programmes and projects at the local, national, regional and global levels as well as to commission, manage and use those evaluations for decision-making. In 2018, IPDET moved to Bern, Switzerland where it was implemented in partnership between the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Bern, the Center for Evaluation at the Saarland University (Germany) and the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank.

43. In 2019, IEO was requested to develop and deliver a training course at IPDET on evaluation in the United Nations. The course introduced participants to the overall context of evaluation in the United Nations, including the importance of evaluation for accountability and learning in the United Nations context and to the UNEG Norms and Standards; discussed the Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for evaluation integrating human rights, gender equality and “leave no one behind” perspectives in United Nations evaluations; and used the example of the IEO and the types of evaluations it conducts. The 2.5-day training course had 24 participants from United Nations agencies, academia, government and evaluation associations from 18 countries. The course was well received by IPDET and the participants and IEO was invited to continue its engagement and deliver the course in 2020.

C. United Nations Evaluation Group

44. IEO continues to be an active and leading member of the UNEG, with the IEO Director acting as vice-chair and all staff of IEO actively involved across various working groups. Key discussions at the annual general meeting in Nairobi in May 2019 included the role and support currently being provided by the UNEG membership to areas of ongoing United Nations reform, including the revision of guidelines for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF), the UNSDCF evaluation process and the establishment of an independent system-wide evaluation function.

45. The UNEG has recommended the articulation of a new system-wide evaluation policy to the Secretary-General. The IEO was a key participant in this policy development in 2019, serving as coordinator of the UNEG working group in the drafting of the policy and support mechanisms. The overarching purpose of the system-wide evaluation policy is to generate cohesive and timely evaluative evidence across the United Nations development system at country, regional and global levels, with particular value given to: (a) governing and legislative bodies in their oversight, decision-making and direction-setting roles for the United Nations system as a whole; (b) the leadership of the United Nations system seeking better understanding on progress and contributions towards the Sustainable Development Goals as well as impediments; and (c) Member States, as they look to the United Nations for guidance and support to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in their respective countries. The new policy is expected to be launched by the Secretary-General in 2020.

D. African Evaluation Association

46. As part of its support to national evaluation capacity development, the IEO contributes to regional and global evaluation bodies such as the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). The ninth AfrEA conference was held in Abidjan in March 2019 with the theme, “Accelerating Africa’s Development: Strengthening National Evaluation Ecosystems.” The IEO contributed substantively to the organization of the conference by co-convening sessions on “the role of the judiciary, executive and legislature in evaluation: responsive national evaluation systems” with

the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results-Anglophone Africa, Twende Mbele,³ the African Development Bank and Oxfam. The IEO also participated in a half-day round table workshop on the professionalization of evaluation, organized by the UNEG Working Group on Professionalization

IV. Oversight and support to decentralized evaluation

A. Investment in evaluation, 2019

47. UNDP spent \$25.7 million on evaluation in 2019.

48. During 2019, the IEO had a budget expenditure of \$10.9 million for evaluations, institutional activities and staff and rental costs, with \$10.5 million allocated from regular resources. The IEO fund allocation was in line with the requested annual budget for the office approved by the Executive Board in decision 2018/1 (DP/2018/4). In 2019, the office saw additional expenses due to both the increased number of ICPEs to secure full coverage and to the additional cost of implementing evaluations in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic.

49. UNDP headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices spent \$14.8 million on evaluation during 2019. This included evaluation implementation costs (\$7.25 million), staff costs (\$6.05 million) and additional evaluation-related costs (\$1.5 million).⁴

B. Decentralized evaluation implementation and quality, 2019

50. During 2019, UNDP completed 290 evaluations planned for the year: 132 project evaluations (46 per cent); 126 Global Environment Facility (GEF) terminal evaluations and midterm reviews (43 per cent); 15 outcome evaluations (5 per cent); and 17 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), thematic or country programme evaluations (6 per cent).

51. The 290 completed evaluations contrast with 531 evaluations planned at the start of 2019, with evaluation expenditure falling from a planned \$16.8 million to an actual recorded expenditure of \$7.25 million (excluding UNDP staff and other costs detailed above). While 75 per cent of GEF evaluations were completed as planned, only 55 per cent of UNDP project evaluations, 30 per cent of UNDAF and other evaluations and 25 per cent of outcome evaluations were completed as planned.

52. The IEO remains concerned that UNDP is not evaluating across its portfolio to capture lessons and results to support the development of its programmatic work. For instance, again in 2019 GEF evaluations represented 43 per cent of all UNDP evaluations, while other UNDP projects accounted for 46 per cent. However, in some regions GEF evaluations accounted for an even higher proportion, e.g., in Africa, where GEF evaluations accounted for 56 per cent of all evaluations (33 of 59 completed), and in the Asia and Pacific region, where they accounted for 53 per cent of evaluations (47 of 89 evaluations).

53. A comparison of the UNDP budget allocation, Sustainable Development Goal prioritization and evaluation implementation between 2018 and 2019 shows that Goals 1, 3 and 16,⁵ while accounting for 58 per cent of the UNDP budget allocation,⁶ accounted for only 29 per cent of evaluations across the same period. Goals 12, 13, 14 and 15,⁷ focused on more environmental issues, accounted for 13 per cent of the organization's budget allocation and 42 per cent of all evaluations.⁸ There appears to be somewhat of a misalignment of evaluative planning and focus

³ Twende Mbele is a collaboration between the Governments of Benin, Ghana, South Africa and Uganda, the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the Hewlett Foundation to strengthen monitoring and evaluation to improve performance and accountability of African Governments.

⁴ Staff time allocations for evaluation and additional evaluation costs are self-reported through the results-oriented annual report. Staff costs are calculated by UNDP based on self-reported staff time allocated to evaluation. Evaluation implementation costs are taken from the Evaluation Resource Centre and are also self-reported and entered by programme units.

⁵ No poverty, good health and well-being, and peace, justice and strong institutions.

⁶ UNDP transparency portal, <https://open.undp.org/>, 10th February 2020

⁷ Responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land.

⁸ Of the 628 evaluations completed between 2019 and 2018, 468 (75 per cent) were tagged with "SDG" and

and the Sustainable Development Goals. With only 10 years to achieve the Goals and meet obligations under the 2030 Agenda, a broader evaluative analysis will be essential to capture what is working and what is not in order to support Governments in their pursuit of the Goals.

54. The IEO quality assessed 201 decentralized evaluations undertaken in 2019.⁹ The quality assessment process found 20.5 per cent (43 evaluations) to be satisfactory; 53.33 per cent (112) to be moderately satisfactory; and 26.2 per cent (55) to be of a moderately unsatisfactory, unsatisfactory or of a highly unsatisfactory quality. This is in line with the quality assessment findings from previous years.

C. Decentralized evaluation support in 2019

55. In response to quality concerns about decentralized evaluations and in turn the credibility and usability of decentralized evaluations overall, IEO and UNDP have embarked on a comprehensive programme to strengthen evaluation across the organization. This was partially enabled through financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation.

56. In January 2019, updated evaluation guidelines were launched with French and Spanish versions released in March 2019. The evaluation guidelines have been updated to reflect several changes in evaluation in recent years across evaluation in UNDP and to bring them in line with the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 and the 2030 Agenda. The evaluation guidelines give renewed emphasis to the importance of planning for evaluations and ensuring appropriate evaluative coverage of UNDP work across programmes; provide greater detail on expected roles and responsibilities for evaluation; and include links to examples of good quality evaluations, with a view to strengthening the quality and utility of future decentralized evaluations.

57. During the year IEO, the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS), the GEF and regional bureaux collaborated on three two-day workshops with 158 monitoring and evaluation focal points and programme staff from 100 country offices. The workshops examined the changes in the evaluation guidelines and introduced practical exercises on reviewing evaluation plans to ensure comprehensive coverage, drafting of effective evaluation terms of reference, approaches for identifying skilled evaluators, managing evaluations, reviewing evaluation reports and ensuring high quality. The workshops were an opportunity for participants to share experiences, challenges and approaches to improve evaluation quality and culture. Workshops were held in Istanbul in February 2019 for the Europe and CIS region, Addis Ababa (in English and French) in June 2019 for the Africa region and in Hurgada, Egypt in October 2019 (in parallel with the National Evaluation Capacities Conference) for the Arab States and Asia-Pacific regions. In addition to face-to-face training, IEO and BPPS conducted a series of webinars and training sessions for UNDP staff members.

58. During 2019, IEO developed an online training and certification package which will be mandatory for all UNDP staff assigned to monitoring and evaluation. A shorter, non-certified course has been developed for all UNDP staff that will outline key evaluation approaches and requirements within UNDP, also based on the UNDP evaluation guidance of 2019. Roll-out will be through 2020.

D. Enhanced Evaluation Resource Centre

59. The Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC) is an online platform which facilitates UNDP efforts to strategically plan and effectively use evaluations for accountability, management for results and knowledge management. The ERC currently holds over 4,500 evaluations and evaluation terms of reference covering 15 years of evaluation implementation. In recent years, the ERC has been further enhanced as an evaluation oversight tool for bureaux and country offices with the addition of detailed dashboards that quickly illustrate overdue evaluations and evaluation quality. Management is able to track management responses and key implementation actions and delays using the ERC bureau and country office dashboards. During 2019, IEO further enhanced the ERC and assigned a number of oversight responsibilities to regional focal points.

209 evaluations were tagged with more than one Goal and appear across several Goals in our analysis.

⁹ UNDAF evaluations and GEF midterm reviews are not quality assessed.

V. United Nations Capital Development Fund and United Nations Volunteers programme

60. The United Nations Capital Development Programme (UNCDF) continued to prioritize its work in evaluation in 2019 in line with commitments made in its Strategic Framework, 2018-2021. UNCDF spent a total of \$882,000 on evaluation in 2019 or 1.3 per cent of UNCDF programmatic expenditure in line with the evaluation policy. The UNCDF Evaluation Unit completed three midterm and final evaluations and started a joint midterm evaluation of the joint UNDP, UN-Women and UNCDF inclusive and equitable local development programme, which supports the economic empowerment of women in least developed countries in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa through investments and capacity support to local governments and women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises.

61. The joint findings of the UNDP-UNCDF Pacific financial inclusion programme, which supports inclusive financial sector development across the Pacific, praised the relevance of the programme to the needs of six Pacific Island countries and its strong performance in the areas of improved policy and regulation, consumer empowerment and financial education, and financial innovation to reach underserved populations. The evaluators recommended expanded support to digital payment systems, increased focus on the inclusion of women and other marginalized populations as well as continuing support to consumer protection and financial education to help ensure sustainable financial inclusion over the long term.

62. The evaluation of the Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformations for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation programme, which is working to expand economic opportunities for women through digital financial inclusion in Bangladesh, judged the programme to be relevant to government priorities in digital financial inclusion and gender equality through support, including cooperation with UNDP, to policy dialogue as well as innovation grants supporting the digitalization of the consumer goods supply chains. Evaluators highlighted weaknesses in programme management that led to initial delays in meeting objectives and recommended that the programme be more systematic in its capacity development work and more focused in promoting gender equality.

63. Finally, the evaluation of the Making Access to Financial Services Possible programme, which supports Governments in 20 least developed countries in Africa and Asia to develop and implement financial inclusion road maps, found the programme to be highly relevant to Governments and complementary to financial sector development initiatives by the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the World Bank. The quality of deliverables was technically high with the programme providing a strong evidence base and clear policy framework for government partners. Evaluators highlighted the need for a clearer strategy to help partner Governments implement the results of UNCDF support once it has been provided as well as changes to the programme's tools to help policymakers better understand differences in the supply and demand for financial services by socioeconomic groups.

64. UNCDF continued to benefit in 2019 from its partnership with the UNDP IEO. This included independent assessment of UNCDF evaluation reports and inclusion in relevant IEO thematic evaluations. UNCDF maintained its cooperation with interested Member States on evaluation, including work with the Australian Government on the evaluation of the Pacific financial inclusion programme. UNCDF stepped up its support to the UNEG, co-launching with UNICEF an interest group on evaluation methods and supporting the development of standards around peer review of evaluation functions across the United Nations system.

65. The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) budget for evaluation in 2019 was around \$76,500, drawn from regular and other resources. The budget covered the cost of UNV participation in the UNEG Evaluation Week 2019 and in the IEO National Evaluation Capacities Conference, as well as the costs of the evaluation team at UNV headquarters in Bonn, Germany. UNV evaluation activities strongly focused on internal capacity-building while continuing to provide technical support and quality assurance to decentralized evaluations. UNV carried out one project evaluation during the year, the midterm evaluation of a project for the establishment of a national volunteer programme in Côte d'Ivoire, implemented jointly by UNV, UNDP and the Government.

66. UNV has four project evaluations in its evaluation plan for 2018-2021; two were finalized in 2018 and 2019 and the remaining two will be conducted in 2020. Two impact evaluations, two thematic evaluations and a mid-term review of the Strategic Framework are planned under the evaluation plan, with the midterm review and one thematic evaluation planned for 2020.

67. In 2019, UNV continued to seek inclusion of its joint work with UNDP in the ICPEs and in IEO thematic evaluations that touch on areas of UNV specialization. In 2019, collaboration between IEO and UNV led to the inclusion of information on UNV, UN Volunteers and volunteerism in the ICPE for Ethiopia. UNV intends to intensify this collaboration by providing data for the upcoming ICPEs in 2020. Key challenges for UNV remain the limited evaluation space and the competing priorities within the organization.

VI. Staffing and finances, 2019

A. Independent Evaluation Office staffing

68. The office continued to build successfully on its sectional structure, actively encouraging and allocating work to ensure that evaluations draw on diverse insights, with colleagues working across the sections. The office now has 34 staff comprising 25 International Professional staff and nine General Service staff. During 2019, a comprehensive open recruitment was undertaken to create 10 new staff positions, including seven International Professional posts and three General Service posts. The recruitment further bolstered the structure of the office bringing in a number of new staff with different professional backgrounds and experience, language and professional skills.

B. Finances

69. In 2019, the IEO spent \$10.9 million for evaluations and other institutional activities (including staffing and rent). This includes a supplementary allocation in the last quarter to finance the extraordinary costs (including security) resulting from the ICPEs conducted in several crisis countries.

70. The IEO continues to partner strategically and selectively with external development agencies and Governments in advancing the evaluation mandate and function beyond its core work programme. In 2019, the office continued its partnerships with the Norwegian and Swiss Governments to support the national evaluation capacities diagnostic tool and decentralized evaluation support. Support for participants at National Evaluation Capacities Conference was provided by the Governments of Denmark and Germany and by UNICEF, UN-Women and the World Bank.

71. In 2020, IEO expects to receive a financial allocation of \$14.7 million, derived from preliminary estimates of the UNDP combined regular and other resources delivery volume of \$4.9 billion during 2019, in line with the revised evaluation policy, which stipulates an increase from 0.2 per cent to 0.3 per cent of programme delivery be allocated for IEO work. The revised evaluation policy allows for additional funds for IEO to support decentralized evaluation across the organization.

VII. Programme of work, 2020 and 2021

A. Corporate section

72. As detailed, 2020 and 2021 will be busy years for the corporate/ thematic evaluation section, with at least 11 evaluations in the design stage for completion in the biennium. Building from the approved IEO 2018-2021 workplan (DP/2018/4), the schedule of submissions to the Executive Board is below.

Session	IEO corporate/thematic report
Annual session, June 2020	Annual report on evaluation (for information) Common chapter evaluability study (for information)
Second regular session, September 2020	The UNDP contribution in middle-income countries (for decision) The UNDP contribution to climate resilience (for decision)

First regular session, January 2021	Conflict prevention and recovery (for decision) Human migration and Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (for decision)
Annual session, June 2021	Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 (for decision) GEF Small Grants Programme (for decision) Annual report on evaluation (for information)
Second regular session, September 2021	UNDP engagement with the private sector (for decision) IEO multiyear evaluation plan (for information)

B. Country programme evaluations section

73. Based on the IEO commitment to provide 100 per cent coverage through evaluation of country programmes prior to the Executive Board's consideration of new CPDs, 2020 will be another year of high volume and activity, with 26 country programme evaluations in the pipeline for CPDs due in 2021.

74. IEO will be introducing a new approach to its country programme assessments. An independent country programme review process (ICPR) will complement ICPEs and be implemented across several countries under evaluation in 2020. The ICPR approach will: (a) provide a rapid, independent assessment of the implementation experience of the country programme, which will support development of the next country programme; and (b) provide the Executive Board with an overview of the progress made by UNDP towards the agreed outputs and outcomes in the current programme period. Criteria have been established by IEO and discussed with regional bureaux to identify which country offices will be the subject of ICPEs and ICPRs in the future.

C. Capacity development section

75. IEO will continue to expand its support for strengthening of the evaluation function across UNDP, including the roll-out of two online evaluation courses, more evaluation webinars, evaluation training for country offices in the Latin America and Caribbean region, a planned update of the evaluation guidelines and the production of a number of other supporting documents to support improved evaluation within UNDP.

76. IEO will engage with UNDP management (bureau directors, resident representatives and deputy resident representatives) in strengthening the evaluation function in line with commitments by the Organizational Performance Group in 2019. The provision of additional resources to the office to support decentralized evaluations, as per the revised evaluation policy, will provide fresh impetus for IEO to engage with regional bureaux and country offices.

77. The IEO will follow up the 2019 National Evaluation Capacities Conference with the publication of the conference proceedings, continued training at the IPDET on evaluation in the United Nations system and development of new capacity development initiatives in collaboration with the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group.

D. IEO Directorate transition

78. In early 2020, the IEO Director, Mr. Indran Naidoo, ended his term after nearly eight years (2012- 2020). The new Director, Mr. Oscar A. Garcia, is no stranger to the IEO or UNDP and worked with the office between December 2005 and July 2013. Since 2014, Mr. Garcia has been the Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation at the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

