



**Executive Board of the
United Nations Development
Programme, the United Nations
Population Fund and the
United Nations Office for
Project Services**

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Evaluation

Annual report on evaluation, 2021

Summary

The annual report on evaluation presents the status of evaluations undertaken in 2021 by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. It illustrates the approach taken by the three entities to provide relevant evaluative knowledge against the continuing challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, including through virtual data collection modalities, the development of synthesis products, and the further refinement of rapid evidence assessments. The report presents key findings and lessons learned from the Independent Evaluation Office outputs on cross-cutting issues and factors affecting organizational performance. It documents UNDP efforts in strengthening decentralized evaluations and highlights improvements in the quality and quantity of UNDP decentralized evaluations, although the focus remains at the project level. While most recommendations from corporate and decentralized evaluations are acted upon, evidence of implementation is limited.

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.



I. Introduction

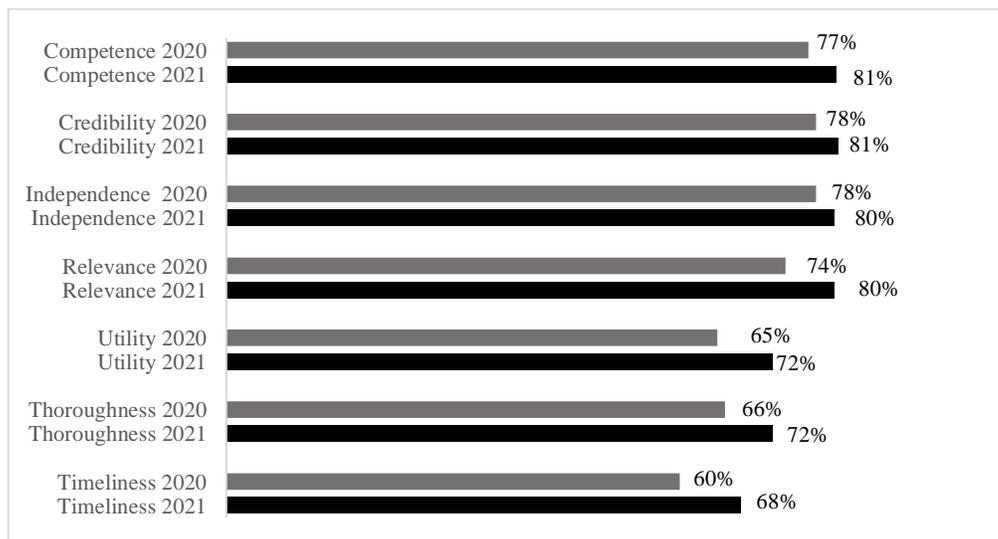
A. Overview

1. In 2021, the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP set out its vision for a renewed evaluation function that more directly addresses the challenges of our times. Adopting a systems approach to evaluation, the Office committed to continue strengthening both its independent function and decentralized evaluations, in support of enhanced evidence-based decision-making. While the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect the ability to collect primary data – particularly at the local level and among vulnerable populations – the Office was nonetheless able to deliver against its workplan.

2. To realize the objectives identified in its strategy for 2021-2025, the Office put a number of initiatives in place to reinforce its knowledge- and data-management work stream. These included a stronger research function with better articulated processes, a more systematic use of innovative methodological approaches, and artificial intelligence tools to automate the collection and processing of data, including lessons extracted from previous assessments by the Office and UNDP decentralized units.

3. Results of a stakeholder survey provided positive feedback on the quality of the work, with improvements registered across rating criteria compared to 2020 (see figure 1).¹ Respondents praised the timeliness, thoroughness, utility, and relevance of the Independent Evaluation Office products. Surveyed stakeholders acknowledged the contribution of the Office to enhancing UNDP effectiveness, while recommending strengthening its outreach through further capacity development and knowledge dissemination, deeper engagement with UNDP leadership for a stronger culture of evaluation, better mechanisms to follow up on recommendations, and increased evaluation resources at the country level. The vast majority of stakeholders (89 per cent and higher) rated the recommendations as impartial, clear, well substantiated and useful, while identifying actionability as an area for improvement.

Figure 1.
Independent Evaluation Office stakeholder satisfaction levels, 2020-2021



Source: Independent Evaluation Office stakeholder survey, 2020 and 2021

¹ Three hundred and ninety-nine stakeholders participated in the Independent Evaluation Office survey, 2021, including members of the Executive Board; UNDP senior management and staff at headquarters, regional hubs, and country offices; staff of other United Nations evaluation offices; members of academia and research institutes; and external consultants.

B. Engagement with the Executive Board

4. The Independent Evaluation Office continued to engage regularly with the Executive Board as the custodian of the evaluation policy through formal and informal dialogue sessions. In 2021, the Office presented Member States with its 2020 annual report; the evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021; three thematic evaluations (on UNDP support to climate change adaptation, conflict-affected countries, the Syrian refugee crisis response, and promoting an integrated resilience approach); and the evaluation of the Small Grants Programme, conducted jointly with the Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The Office also submitted to the Executive Board 20 independent country programme evaluations to inform its decision-making ahead of the renewal of UNDP country programmes.

C. Engagement with UNDP senior management

5. Throughout 2021, the Office met with the UNDP Executive Group on thematic and strategic evaluations. The sessions constituted an important opportunity to reinforce the dialogue between the Office and UNDP, providing valuable feedback to inform future work. As part of its 2021-2025 strategy, the Office appointed seven staff members as thematic focal points, who regularly liaised with UNDP colleagues to enhance evaluation quality and utility.

6. Through its capacity development section and the network of regional focal points, the office collaborated with UNDP management in enhancing both oversight and technical support to improve the planning, quality and coverage of decentralized evaluations. Regional focal points participated as observers in eight Programme Appraisal Committee meetings to ensure that recommendations from recent independent country programme evaluations are considered in the formulation of planning documents.

D. Advisory bodies

7. The Evaluation Advisory Panel continued to provide advice on direction, development perspectives, and methodological guidance on evaluation in international contexts, promoting coherence and consistency in the approach of the Office. Feedback from the panel informed the conceptualization of the evaluation syntheses and implementation of the independent country programme evaluations performance rating system.

8. The Office liaised regularly with the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee to seek advice on ways to strengthen the independence, credibility and utility of the evaluation function.

9. All evaluations were externally peer-reviewed by thematic and country-level experts, hired individually or as members of research centres and think tanks.

II. Independent Evaluation Office outputs, 2021

A. Overview

10. In 2021, the Office conducted three thematic evaluations – presented to the Executive Board in 2022 – on:

- (a) UNDP support to youth economic empowerment (first regular session);
- (b) UNDP support to energy access and transition (first regular session); and
- (c) Financing the pandemic recovery (annual session).

The evaluations were preceded and informed, to varying extents, by reflections that summarized evidence from lessons learned in previous evaluations. Additional reflections were conducted on UNDP-supported environment initiatives financed through the GEF; ensuring access to safe and clean water resources; gender as an accelerator for the Sustainable Development Goals; UNDP support to empowering marginalized groups; and development financing (conducted jointly with the Evaluation Unit of UNCDF).

11. The Independent Evaluation Office conducted 16 independent country programme evaluations, covering all regions of the world and representing \$2.7 billion (9 per cent) of the UNDP programmatic budget for the related period. It brought to completion three evaluations started in late 2020. The majority of evaluations covered African countries, including an assessment of the common country programme in Cape Verde, conducted jointly with the evaluation offices of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA.

Table 1.
Independent country programme evaluations, 2020

| | <i>Evaluations</i> |
|--|--|
| Africa | Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Sudan |
| Arab States | Egypt |
| Asia and the Pacific | India, Nepal, Pacific Multi-Country Office |
| Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States | Moldova, Ukraine |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru |

12. Based on a growing demand for concise and aggregated evaluation evidence,² in 2021 the Independent Evaluation Office conceptualized evaluation syntheses to integrate existing evidence from independent country programme evaluations and decentralized evaluations, with the aim of increasing the usage and applicability of findings while developing new insights. The first two syntheses focused on UNDP work in the Europe and the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) region, building on evidence gained through 14 evaluations conducted in 2019-2020 – and the Sahel, to support the UNDP programmatic offer in the region through evaluative evidence on UNDP performance, good practices, and lessons learned from over 180 assessments conducted in the 2014-2021 period.

B. Key findings and lessons learned

13. **UNDP added value and strategic positioning.** Stakeholders engaged in Independent Evaluation Office evaluations reported an image of UNDP as a neutral, responsive and trusted provider of development services in support of diverse national priorities, promoting compliance with international norms and standards. Governments appreciated UNDP assistance both in strategic and politically sensitive areas (such as elections, justice reform, and energy access) and in technical domains where national expertise may be more limited. In fragile contexts, while its limits vis-à-vis resource and need gaps were recognized, UNDP support was deemed vital for the reactivation of governing institutions and the development of national capacities. The continuity of UNDP presence, its collective project experience, and the transparency and efficiency of its procurement were all considered invaluable assets in the partnership with government and other stakeholders.

14. **Response to COVID-19.** UNDP was quick to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrating flexibility and leadership in its response to the pandemic. UNDP promptly reprogrammed some of its activities and mobilized additional resources to support the digitization of services for government and small business. Flexibility in the design of interventions helped UNDP adapt to unexpected needs and reach new beneficiaries wherever procurement systems were robust enough to allow for a quick and transparent response, including for the acquisition of tools that ensured the continuity of UNDP and government operations. The pandemic presented an opportunity to accelerate innovative ideas such as the development of mobile apps to support people with disabilities, and e-health platforms for women living in rural areas. Evidence on the use of COVID-19 impact studies to inform

² Decision 2020/15

national responses was more mixed. Like other United Nations system organizations, UNDP was constrained by shortages of discretionary funding, with mixed records on financial resource mobilization.

15. **Resources.** While UNDP was able to leverage financial resources from different development partners, resource availability remained a challenge to ensure the achievement of the objectives included in country programme documents, particularly outside crisis contexts. The capacity of UNDP to access government funding in support of cost-sharing was sometimes hampered by the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on national fiscal spaces and provisions in national legislation.

16. **Scale.** The ability of UNDP to achieve deep and large-scale results was hampered by the fragmented nature of its programmes, with projects of often limited scope and scale approved at different stages of country programme implementation, challenging the coherence and sustainability of results. Downstream work, struggling to make a significant difference beyond its localized impact, was often not connected to, or translated into, upstream national policies. Synergies among initiatives within and across portfolios were seldom explored, reflecting a lack of policy coordination at the national level. Where adopted, integrated approaches better addressed complexity and improved the sustainability of results, reducing the risk of multiple simultaneous responses to different empowerment drivers.

17. **Sustainability.** UNDP promoted sustainability by aligning its programmes with national strategies, cultivating institutional partnerships, and ensuring stakeholder ownership of capacity development interventions. Few projects, however, developed a sustainability plan to stimulate commitment and promote ripple effects. The UNDP influence on, and partnerships with, subnational institutions – considered increasingly important to operationalize policies and strategies – was conditional on its ability to keep local offices open, or the availability of resources to finance long-term projects. Few reflections stressed the importance of responding to local needs and considering local knowledge throughout project implementation, favouring participatory approaches and decentralized implementation modalities to address specific issues and enhance ownership.

18. **Partnerships.** Partnerships with other United Nations organizations promoted programmatic synergies, taking advantage of multiple sectoral expertise. While examples of cooperation existed across thematic areas, they were more visible in local and social development and less in environment and climate-change issues. In crisis-affected countries, the partnership with peacekeeping missions was deemed key to expanding the geographical reach of interventions but challenging in terms of coordinating and defining roles and responsibilities in the absence of a clearly understood framework for joint work. Funding mechanisms such as the Peacebuilding Fund and the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund remained the main country-level partnership drivers, while opportunities for collaboration through the coordination and sequencing of separate projects were explored only in a limited manner. Evaluations found promising engagements with the private sector to advance innovation and economic opportunities, while room remained to leverage these partnerships beyond financial assets. The collaboration with international financial institutions – which have a broad presence and strong leverage to advance governance reforms – was not systematically pursued and lacked a strategic approach.

19. **Inclusivity.** UNDP support maintained a strong focus on inclusivity through interventions aimed at leaving no one behind for social protection, access to livelihood assets, and the promotion of inclusive economic development in vulnerable communities. To effectively address barriers to results and avoid conflicts among groups, UNDP programmes should identify those furthest behind and how they are affected by multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities.

20. **Gender equality and women's empowerment.** The Strategic Plan approach of integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into all areas of work has been a key accelerator of development results. Gender equality programmes in UNDP remain underfunded, however, with overall investments well below the organizational commitment of 15 per cent to gender-transformative projects. While additional core funding has been allocated

to gender projects since 2018, most projects do not put significant resources into gender initiatives and mainstreaming. Challenges persist in moving towards more gender-responsive and transformative approaches that adequately account for social norms and other structural barriers to equality. The UNDP Gender Seal was found to enhance attention paid to gender equality and women's empowerment in programmatic areas, promoting the adoption of gender-sensitive policies and strategies to close the gender gap and increase the number of women engaged in decision-making.

21. **Monitoring and evaluation systems and evaluation culture.** While aligned with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the use of broad indicators at the outcome level in country-level results frameworks did not allow an understanding of UNDP contributions to higher-level impact. Connections between project and programme outcomes were missing, and country programme frameworks were seldom revised, even when it became apparent that results and indicators were unattainable or no longer relevant. At the project level, variability in the quality and comprehensiveness of results reporting affected the overall reliability of the UNDP monitoring system, limiting the potential for accountability and learning to inform decision-making. UNDP seldom conducted assessments that would allow the tracking of user experience of service delivery. In the case of complex and large initiatives, an absence of timely performance reviews increased risks and affected the ability to achieve expected results.

III. Oversight and support to decentralized evaluation

A. Investment in evaluation

22. UNDP country offices spent \$14.27 million on evaluation during 2021. This included evaluation implementation costs (\$9.04 million), staff costs (\$5.16 million), and additional evaluation-related costs (\$0.07 million).³ Expenditure at headquarters and by regional bureaus in implementing, supporting, and overseeing evaluation amounted to \$2.13 million, including evaluation costs (\$0.8 million), staff costs (\$1.32 million), and additional evaluation expenditures (\$0.015 million).

B. Decentralized evaluation implementation and quality

23. UNDP planned to conduct 559 decentralized evaluations in 2021.⁴ Of these, 352 (63 per cent) were completed, with the rest overdue, cancelled, or delayed for completion at a later date. Globally, 32 countries were not covered by any evaluation in 2021.

24. The implementation rate of decentralized evaluations in 2021 provides a highly encouraging signal, with more than 100 additional evaluations compared to 2020, reversing a downward trend that started in 2017. With the exception of the Regional Bureau for Africa, all regional bureaus have successfully completed more evaluations than the average for 2017-2020, with the highest increases registered in Asia and the Pacific.⁵ The majority of these evaluations, however (91 per cent), remain project-related rather than strategic in nature. More than a third of them (35 per cent) focus on GEF-funded projects. Only 10 thematic and outcome evaluations were completed at regional and country levels, reducing opportunities for accountability and learning around the achievement of more strategic results. UNDP evaluations spanned across the Sustainable Development Goals, with a prevalence around Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), Goal 13 (climate action), and Goal 1 (eliminating poverty). Other signature

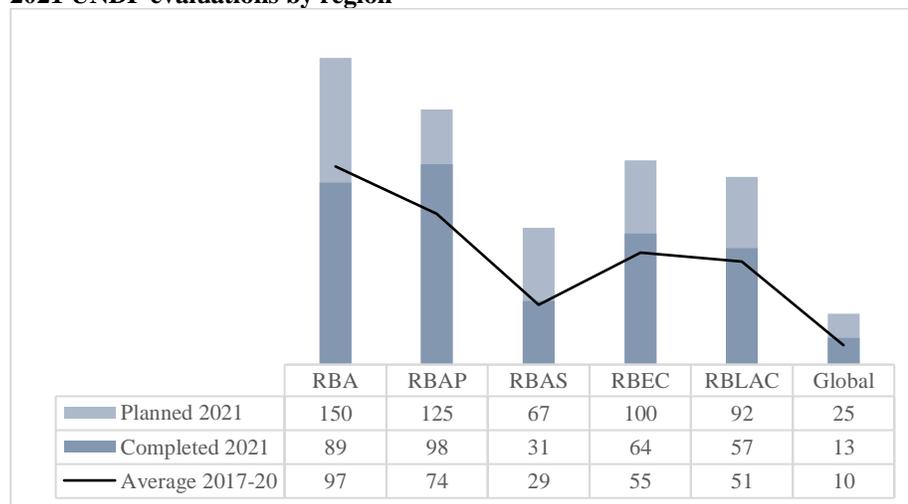
³ Staff time allocations for evaluation and additional evaluation costs are self-reported through the results-oriented annual report. Staff costs for evaluation are calculated by UNDP based on those self-reported figures. Evaluation implementation costs are taken from the Evaluation Resource Centre and are also self-reported and entered by programme units.

⁴ Based on the evaluation plan submitted to the Evaluation Resource Centre in August 2021.

⁵ The calculated average takes into account all decentralized evaluations completed in 2017-20.

solutions and/or key themes of the UNDP portfolio – decent work and economic growth, gender, and inequality – figure less prominently.⁶

Figure 2.
2021 UNDP evaluations by region



RBA=Regional Bureau for Africa; RBAP=Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific; RBAS=Regional Bureau for Arab States; RBEC=Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS; RBLAC=Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
Source: Independent Evaluation Office analysis of Evaluation Resource Centre data

25. The quality assessment scores show an overall improvement in quality compared to 2020. Of the 272 evaluations quality-assessed by the Independent Evaluation Office, 42 per cent were rated ‘satisfactory’; 48 per cent ‘moderately satisfactory’; and 10 per cent ‘moderately unsatisfactory’ or ‘unsatisfactory’. The Asia and the Pacific region continued to have over 40 per cent ‘satisfactory’ decentralized evaluations rated, and the Office observed significant improvement in the quality of evaluations conducted in the Arab States and the Europe and the CIS regions, with 58 per cent and 47 per cent of reports, respectively, rated ‘satisfactory’.

26. The first edition of the Evaluation Excellence Awards recognized the high quality of six evaluations – by UNDP country offices in Bangladesh, Ecuador, Nepal, and South Sudan, as well the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and UNCDF. The evaluations were appraised for the strength of their evidence and their utility for management and decision-making, with particular recognition for gender-responsiveness and use of innovative methods. This practice provides the Independent Evaluation Office with an incentive system that rewards the conduct of high-quality decentralized evaluations.

C. Gender-responsive evaluations

27. The Independent Evaluation Office incorporates the Evaluation Performance Indicator of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women into its quality assessment system. The analysis of 178 evaluations conducted in 2021 denoted a mean Evaluation Performance Indicator score of 6.87, signalling that UNDP evaluations overall meet the Action Plan requirements, with a rating increase of 35 per cent over the past three years. UNDP received three additional points for having conducted an evaluation of the UNDP contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment in 2015.

⁶ Based on 284 evaluations tagged by the Independent Evaluation Office. Multiple Sustainable Development Goals tags were applied to individual evaluations as appropriate.

D. Decentralized evaluation support

28. The Independent Evaluation Office updated the UNDP evaluation guidelines, which had been launched in 2019, to reflect recent relevant policy changes that had occurred in UNDP and provide further clarification in response to user feedback. The guidelines are now aligned with both the UNDP Evaluation Policy, 2019, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and are available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. A number of guidance notes on evaluations conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic were also updated.

29. In partnership with regional bureaus, the Independent Evaluation Office conducted tailored training for more than 160 staff and monitoring and evaluation focal points in Regional Bureau for Africa and Regional Bureau for Arab States country offices. The Office offered 20 scholarships for UNDP monitoring and evaluation officers to virtually attend the International Programme for Development Evaluation and Training, 2021. Almost 200 UNDP staff completed the organizational course on evaluation, bringing the number of certified staff to 670.

30. In 2021, the Independent Evaluation Office continued to support strengthening decentralized evaluations through both its Capacity Development Section and its 10 regional focal points, who maintained a close and continued dialogue with the regional bureaus and country offices. The regional focal points provided technical and financial support (up to 50 per cent of the budget) to decentralized country programme evaluations. The implementation of these evaluations provided a platform for the Office and regional bureaus to collaborate and advocate for strategic, high-quality decentralized evaluations led by country offices.

31. In collaboration with the Bureau of Policy and Programme Support, the Executive Office and the regional bureaus, in 2021 the Independent Evaluation Office developed a decentralized evaluation strengthening and accountability strategy to improve the quality, accountability and oversight of decentralized evaluations in the future. The strategy is being implemented in four phases, considering the financial implications of some of the planned activities. Details are included in the UNDP report and roadmap for strengthening the decentralized evaluation function.

IV. Use of evaluations

32. With few exceptions, UNDP follows the institutionalized process of follow-up to evaluation recommendations through the preparation of management responses to evaluation reports. A study commissioned by the Independent Evaluation Office in 2021 found the majority of responses to evaluations to be of good quality, including action plans that adequately addressed the evaluation recommendations with clear timelines and responsibilities.⁷ The percentage of ‘satisfactory’ action plans was higher for Independent Evaluation Office evaluations (88 per cent) than for decentralized evaluations (54 per cent).

33. Although the majority (around 70 per cent) of actions included in Independent Evaluation Office and decentralized evaluation reports since 2017 has been acted upon, evidence of actual implementation is limited. Ninety per cent of decentralized evaluation reports and 70 per cent of Independent Evaluation Office evaluations sampled by the external study did not find information in this respect. Recommendations appear to have been used mainly to inform the design of new projects or advocate for programmatic changes, with limited evidence of evaluations informing higher-level strategic or operational changes. The implementation of recommendations was not always timely: 42 per cent of actions on recommendations presented to the Executive Board in 2021 had been fully implemented, while 24 per cent from decentralized evaluations had yet to be initiated or were overdue.

⁷ The study covered a total of 125 evaluations conducted between 2016 and 2020 by the Independent Evaluation Office and decentralized units.

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

A. United Nations Capital Development Fund

34. In 2021, UNCDF maintained its commitment to independent evaluation, spending \$800,000 (0.93 per cent of total UNCDF programmatic expenditure) and approaching the 1 per cent target set out in the UNDP evaluation policy. UNCDF was able to maintain three professional staff in its Evaluation Unit, including one staff member co-funded by the Government of Italy.

35. UNCDF completed three evaluations in 2021, including an evaluation of the UNCDF Strategic Framework 2018-2021 and its accompanying gender strategy and policy. The report concluded that the Strategic Framework had positioned UNCDF well to respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. UNCDF was found to have effectively adapted its programming in response to emerging development themes and shifts in public and private finance market systems, leveraging its unique mandate to catalyse capital for individual projects and building on its expertise and local relationships as strategic assets. The evaluation found, however, that the design and operationalization of the Strategic Framework around the existing structure of programme divisions limited the ability of UNCDF to work on the basis of a common vision and strategy. The evaluation highlighted the inability of many initiatives to leverage additional non-core resources, threatening the institutional sustainability of the organization. UNCDF was found to have moved forward successfully in mainstreaming a gender approach in its work, though further progress was likely to be limited failing additional resources to build the necessary technical expertise.

36. The evaluation of the jobs, skills and finance programme in the Gambia – funded by the European Union – acknowledged the relevance of the programme to the National Development Plan, and its contribution to improving financial inclusion and vocational skills development for young people and women. Despite limited impact on job creation at mid-term, significant achievements demonstrated how climate resilience objectives could be incorporated into local development planning. Staffing gaps and ineffective programme results tracking affected programme implementation. Restrictions caused by the pandemic to disbursements under the Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility affected the planned scaling-up and the financial inclusion sub-programme.

37. Promoting the integration of micro-merchants into the fast-moving consumer goods sector and financial service value chains through the acquisition of digital financial services, the Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformation Programme in Bangladesh was founded to fill a gap for financially underserved economic actors, complementing efforts by other development partners and the Government. The focus of the project on the male-dominated micro-merchants' sub-sector made it difficult to meet the objectives around women's financial and digital inclusion. Despite delays due to the outbreak of the pandemic, at mid-term the project was considered successful in its implementation of 10 pilot initiatives, with the onboarding of almost 7,000 merchants.

38. UNCDF received the Independent Evaluation Office evaluation excellence award, 2021, for gender-responsive evaluation for its midterm evaluation of the inclusive and equitable local development programme. This built on its record for high-quality evaluations, with all 11 UNCDF evaluations assessed by the Office in 2018-2021 rated 'satisfactory' or 'highly satisfactory'.

39. Under the new Strategic Framework, UNCDF will increase the number of thematic evaluations to help senior managers consider performance questions more systematically at the organizational level. The Evaluation Unit will publish syntheses of evaluation results to help promote the use of evaluation findings.

40. The Evaluation Unit continued to actively contribute to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group, with the head of evaluation serving as one of the executive vice-chairs of the Group.

B. United Nations Volunteers

41. The UNV programme budget for evaluation, 2021 (\$200,000, drawn from core and non-core funds), covered the final evaluation of its Strategic Framework, 2018-2021, as well as the costs of the evaluation team.

42. Building on the findings of the midterm review conducted in 2020, the evaluation of the Strategic Framework acknowledged UNV contributions to the work of the United Nations system with flexible, timely and effective volunteer solutions. The evaluation found that UNV had responded robustly to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating agility in mobilizing national and community-level volunteers in more than 100 countries, while enabling the United Nations system to benefit from online volunteering services for the delivery of critical location-neutral tasks. The evaluation recommended that UNV reinforce its role as a system-wide service – including through additional country-level capacities – and expand and diversify its partner base. The evaluation called on UNV to continue to act as a global advocate for volunteerism for sustainable development and ensure stronger complementarity between promoting volunteerism and volunteer mobilization, requesting that the programme continue promoting gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. The evaluation also suggested furthering the digital transformation of UNV for future efficiency gains.

43. Supported by the Independent Evaluation Office, UNV continued to provide technical advice and quality assurance to decentralized evaluation follow-up, including the drafting and tracking of management responses. In 2021, UNV received the 2020 Independent Evaluation Office Excellence Award for its outstanding ‘final evaluation report of the UNV talent and capacity development programme for an inclusive United Nations system for persons with disabilities’. The award speaks for the continued efforts of UNV to improve the quality and utility of evaluations and to strengthen the culture of evaluation.

44. In line with the development of the Strategic Framework, 2022-2025, UNV has developed a new evaluation plan that reflects its priorities. As UNV has been transitioning away from traditional project implementation, all evaluations during the next Strategic Framework period will be thematic.

VI. Advancing global evaluation culture and practice

A. The Global Evaluation Initiative

45. Initiated by the Independent Evaluation Office and the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank, the Global Evaluation Initiative is an inclusive global partnership committed to developing country-owned, sustainable monitoring and evaluation frameworks and capacities to promote the use of evidence in public decision-making, enhance accountability, and achieve better results. Since its launch in 2020, the Initiative has developed into a strong and effective partnership, bolstered by its constituent partners’ dynamism and commitment to collaboration, with 20 members now actively participating in its Implementation Committee.

46. In 2021, the Initiative organized a number of regional and country-level events, including the gLOCAL Evaluation Week, which fostered conversations around the role of evaluation for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and discussed opportunities for joint efforts to offset national challenges to monitoring and evaluation. The Initiative team developed a monitoring and evaluation systems analysis tool to assess national capacities and inform long-term evaluation capacity development programmes.

47. In partnership with the Initiative, the Independent Evaluation Office is organizing the National Evaluation Capacity Conference, 2022, which will focus on resilient national evaluation systems for sustainable development. The conference will be a valuable opportunity

for capacity development and knowledge exchange among UNDP programme countries in support of South-South and triangular cooperation.

B. The United Nations Evaluation Group

48. In addition to its regular contribution to United Nations Evaluation Group programme of work – which included support to finalizing the guidelines for the evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – the Independent Evaluation Office engaged in two collaborative exercises with the evaluation offices of other United Nations organizations: the evaluation of the common country programme in Cape Verde (2018-2022) and the evaluation synthesis of United Nations system and development bank work towards Goal 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), led by UNICEF.

49. At the end of 2021, in collaboration with other United Nations organizations, the Independent Evaluation Office started planning for joint systematic reviews of evaluative evidence of Sustainable Development Goals achievement, organized around the five pillars of the Goals (people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership). Completion of the synthesis reviews – which will build on a rich body of evidence consisting of more than 3,000 evaluations from United Nations organizations, 10,000 impact evaluations, and almost 1,000 systematic assessments across the Sustainable Development Goals – is planned for end-2024.

50. At the annual general meeting, 2022, the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office was elected Chair of the United Nations Evaluation Group for the period 2022-2024.

C. Joint efforts to support COVID-19 evaluations

51. The Independent Evaluation Office continued to play an important role in joint efforts to evaluate the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided inputs to the ‘Early Lessons and Evaluability of the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund’ (March 2021) and the planning of the forthcoming system-wide evaluation of the United Nations development system response to COVID-19, led by the Executive Office of the United Nations Secretary General.

52. Together with UNICEF (on behalf of the United Nations Evaluation Group), the Office participated in the core management and reference group of the COVID-19 global evaluation coalition of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The Office contributed to an early synthesis of lessons and emerging evidence on the initial COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery efforts and gave strategic guidance on the development of an evaluative framework to guide the coalition and evaluation organizations in their COVID-19 pandemic evaluations and evaluation syntheses. A joint strategic evaluation of the overall COVID-19 response and recovery effort, with a focus on coherence and impact, is planned for 2022.

VII. Staffing and finances, 2021

A. Staffing

53. The structural arrangements of the Independent Evaluation Office continued to operate successfully, with staff working across sections to make sure that evaluations drew on diverse insights. In 2021, its staff comprised 35 posts. Staff members continued to represent countries in all regions, with an average 15 years’ experience in development and evaluation across a range of organizations, including expertise related to knowledge and data management.

B. Budget

54. Recognizing the uncertainties surrounding development funding during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Independent Evaluation Office budget for 2021 was set at \$12 million, of which the Office spent \$11.42 million (95.2 per cent) on evaluations and other institutional activities.

55. Since 2017, overall evaluation resources have increased from 0.48 per cent to 0.58 per cent of UNDP (core and non-core) programme utilization.⁸ Despite the improvement, there remains a significant gap to reach the 1 per cent prescribed in the UNDP evaluation policy, 2019.⁹

Table 2.
UNDP evaluation resources

| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Independent Evaluation Office expenditures | 9.0 | 8.7 | 10.9 | 11.2 | 11.4 |
| Decentralized evaluations | 12.7 | 13.3 | 14.8 | 14.5 | 16.4 |
| Total resources UNDP evaluation function | 21.8 | 22.0 | 25.7 | 25.7 | 27.8 |
| Share of UNDP programme resources to evaluation | 0.48 | 0.48 | 0.58 | 0.57 | 0.58 |

Source: Independent Evaluation Office calculations of UNDP utilization and decentralized evaluation budget data

56. In keeping with evaluation policy stipulations and the UNDP approved integrated budget of the Strategic Plan,¹⁰ the Office developed its 2022 work programme to utilize funding for \$13.01 million, with anticipated step increases thereafter, to reach the \$16 million target in fiscal year 2024.

C. The multi-year workplan of the Independent Evaluation Office

57. The multi-year workplan, 2022-2025, of the Independent Evaluation Office will allow the Office to evaluate UNDP achievements under the new Strategic Plan adequately and comprehensively, with a particular focus on the UNDP response to the global challenges of our times – COVID-19 recovery, the harmful effects of climate change, inequality, and exclusion from achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

58. The Office will present three corporate/thematic evaluations each year, two at the first regular session and one at the annual session, plus the annual report on evaluation. Since the development strategies of the United Nations and UNDP will continue to evolve, the array of evaluations will be subject to refinement in accordance with the requirements of the Executive Board and UNDP management.

Table 3.
Thematic evaluations of the Independent Evaluation Office, 2022-2025

| <i>Evaluation title</i> | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 2022 | Evaluation of UNDP support to youth economic empowerment Evaluation of UNDP support to energy access and transition Financing the pandemic recovery: a formative evaluation of the UNDP response to the pandemic and Sustainable Development Goals financing. |
| 2023 | Formative evaluation of UNDP integration of ‘leave no one behind’ principles Evaluation of UNDP support to strengthening social protection systems Evaluation of UNDP support to access to justice |

⁸ Based on expenditure figures provided by UNDP, March 2022

⁹ DP/2019/29

¹⁰ DP/2021/29, para 38 (d)

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 2024 | Evaluation of UNDP digital transformation in support of access to public services Evaluation of UNDP nature-based solutions for development Evaluation of UNDP strategic innovation |
| 2025 | Evaluation of UNDP corporate learning, performance, and impact measurement Strategic Plan evaluation |

59. The Independent Evaluation Office will continue to honour its commitment to evaluate all UNDP country programmes reaching conclusion through independent country programme evaluations, with timely submissions informing Executive Board decisions on the renewal of country programme documents.

Table 4.
Independent country programme evaluations, 2023-2025¹¹

| | <i>Country</i> |
|-------------|--|
| 2023 | Benin, Bhutan, Burundi, Cambodia, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo |
| 2024 | Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Paraguay, South Africa |
| 2025 | Armenia, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, ¹² Malaysia, Mexico, North Macedonia, Panama, Serbia, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Uruguay, Uzbekistan |

60. Evaluation synthesis reports will start in 2022 with three geographically focused analyses on UNDP work in the Caribbean, the Maghreb and Southeast Asia. For the continuation of the Reflections series, a number of themes have been identified in consultation with UNDP management, including sustainable local development, boosting women's political participation, and support to smart cities.

61. The Independent Evaluation Office is committed to supporting accountability and learning in UNDP through evaluations that meet the highest standards and insightfully support the organization in addressing the complex development challenges to which it is called to respond. The strategy for 2021-2025 will guide the Office in its efforts to enhance the quality, efficiency, and use of UNDP evaluations through methodological innovations, capacity development, and enhanced outreach.

¹¹ Preliminary list, to be confirmed annually with UNDP regional bureaus

¹² References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)