



**Opening remarks by the Director; Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), Mr. Indran A. Naidoo
at the presentation of the Strategic Plan evaluation 6 September 2017, New York, USA**

Distinguished Board members and colleagues, it is my pleasure to present to you this afternoon the evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan and Global and Regional programmes conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office.

The report covers the current 2014-2017 Strategic Plan cycle. The evaluation team sought evidence of whether UNDP is achieving intended outcomes under the Strategic Plan and whether the Strategic Plan, Global Programme, and Regional Programmes are serving as effective tools for organizing and guiding UNDP programming and activities. It covers and was undertaken during a time of significant challenges, restructuring and reorganization efforts.

Our intention to undertake this evaluation was indicated to you already in January 2014, as we proposed an evaluation plan for the current cycle. Its purpose was to respond to IEO's unique mandate to report directly to the Executive Board, a modality further cemented by the subsequent 2016 Evaluation Policy. From our side, it was also intentionally timed to your discussion of the *next* UNDP strategic plan.

As a validation of the IEO's mandate and ability to address issues that affect UNDP leadership and strategy as-a-whole; it is with considerable gratitude that I acknowledge the richness and sincerity of attention already given to the evaluation; in terms of the management response provided; the several instances of the Administrator's reference; as well as the interest and reactions of the Executive Board President and membership and at this formal session and at earlier informal meetings.

This evaluation was carried out by senior IEO evaluators, joined on the podium alongside IEO Deputy Director, Mr Arild Hague. The IEO team whom I wish to introduce are Mr. Alan Fox, Ms. Vijaya Vadivelu and Ms. Ana Rosa Soares. I also wish to acknowledge the Director of the Office of Audit and Investigations, Mr Helge Osttveiten, for his collaboration on the joint institutional assessment of UNDP, a first such effort, reported to you in June, and which forms an important

background to this evaluation. Also, I wish to recognize members of the IEO Evaluation Advisory Panel, who helped to oversee the work: Ray Rist, Elliot Stern and Thomas Schwandt,

As the most comprehensive assessment of UNDP work, the evaluation used evidence obtained from document reviews, meta-analysis of evaluations and audits, regional and country case study missions, interviews, focus groups and surveys. In total, documentary evidence was supplemented by over 1000 interviews with staff and stakeholders at HQ as well as 90 other locations around the globe. Triangulating among multiple perspectives and evidential sources we came to judgement on the balance of UNDP performance in a number of areas.

What follows is only a very brief and select summary of the report findings, conclusions and recommendations, set out through the three main areas of work for the organization: sustainable development pathways, governance and resilience, as well as crosscutting issues of gender and partnerships.

UNDP was well-positioned to provide support as countries accelerated their efforts to meet the 2015 end date for the MDGs and prepare for the Sustainable Development Goals. At this early juncture in the SDGs, UNDP has made a promising start through the MAPS programme, which assists countries to harmonise the SDGs with national planning priorities. Our recommendation is that assisting countries with the SDGs should be a cross-cutting priority for all UNDP country offices.

UNDP states that its overarching objective is to help the poorest of the poor and most marginalized populations. However, whilst evidence suggests that UNDP has embedded a multidimensional perspective of poverty across national and global debates; we note concerns that UNDP sometimes settles too easily for small-scale livelihood interventions that may not be sustainable.

UNDP has managed over one third of GEF projects and a similar percentage of projects under the new Green Climate Fund. It is through environmental services that UNDP works most directly at the community level, especially through its management of the GEF small grants programme. The evaluation acknowledges UNDP achievements in assisting countries to promote greater energy efficiency and more sustainable energy production, with special attention to poor and rural communities.

UNDP has in many countries been an important service provider of democratic governance and public administration support, helping to solidify peaceful and resilient state-society relations. It is the area of work where UNDP raises and expends about half of its resource, primarily to help strengthen basic services, as well as accountability, the rule of law, electoral systems and peacebuilding. While UNDP is well positioned to promote governance reform, it can do more to push for inclusive and accountable processes, and we recommend that UNDP be more proactive in supporting sectoral governance approaches and more persuasive in promoting democratic governance reforms.

The evaluation calls attention to the work of UNDP to help governments improve their civil service processes, especially in countries that have been in crisis. Governance support needs to be targeted to critical government functions that are essential to stability. UNDP should more strategically support Sustainable Development Goal 16 and related intergovernmental agreements on peacebuilding and State-building.

Resilience forms the third main area of work for the organization, and its internal organization of support for disaster risk reduction was restructured during this period; in effect dissolving a well-recognized crisis prevention and recovery bureau. Nevertheless, the UNDP Crisis Response Unit has been effective at deploying staff and consultant resources, and at quickly releasing initial funding to get recovery programmes moving. Disaster risk reduction is an area that has important synergies with the rapidly expanding UNDP climate change adaptation support to countries. The evaluation identifies ‘cash for work’ programmes as interventions that often receive too much attention in early recovery engagements, displacing prevention, planning and coordination efforts. We recommend that UNDP retain resilience as a distinct area of work under the plan.

With respect to **gender**, the evaluation focuses especially on UNDPs efforts to implement its gender equality strategy, and its contributions to women’s empowerment through support to partner governments. The evaluation notes some weaknesses, such as limitations in the implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy, both in terms of providing resources to support gender programming and in mainstreaming gender equality across UNDP programme areas. Work on gender equality and women's empowerment should not be confined to a gender team alone but should ensure that there is specific gender expertise also associated with programmatic areas such as environment, energy and crisis response, where gender mainstreaming remains weak.

During the past four years, UNDP has clarified its corporate structure and defined more precisely its operational approaches to **South-South and triangular cooperation**. The UNDP role as administrative agent for the United Nations Office for South-South cooperation is acknowledged in the report, along with recent improvements made to the office's planning and management. Challenges remain in the mainstreaming of South-South cooperation in country-level programming, and UNDP has yet to prioritize thematic areas where South-South exchanges will be pursued more systematically.

The evaluation analyzed the contribution of the **fifth global programme and the five regional programmes**. The global programme fulfils an important policy support function that has enabled UNDP to maintain intellectual engagement in the global development arena, by participating in major international events and channeling country-level lessons to global agreements. Yet we also consider the programme’s results framework and indicators to be excessive as they cover the breadth of UNDP work under the Strategic Plan, including country-level results. We view the global programme more as a funding line to support staff positions for achieving corporate-wide results, than as a distinct global programme, and consequently,

recommend that UNDP change the global programme into a service line for supporting staff positions at global and regional levels.

With respect to **regional programmes**, we note the challenges faced by the teams during the major restructuring, including shifting personnel from headquarters to the regional hubs, and with three of the regional hubs changing countries. The regional programmes have variably expanded support for new approaches and innovative solutions and promoted sub-regional programming, but in some regions too many country-related activities overlap with country office programming. We recommend that UNDP reassess the roles and financial sustainability of the regional hubs, striving to make them centres of excellence for innovation and learning while expanding cooperation and partnerships with regional institutions.

In terms of **institutional effectiveness** we found, building on our earlier joint assessment; that there are signs of improvement in terms of higher-quality programming, openness, agility and adaptability, but these have had limited impact on harnessing knowledge, solutions and expertise to improve results and institutional effectiveness, as envisaged in the Strategic Plan. To better promote a results culture, UNDP leadership should encourage an environment that welcomes critical reflection and continuous organizational learning for improved results and institutional effectiveness. Beyond reporting for compliance and capturing best practices, the focus should be on using lessons learned to harness knowledge, solutions and expertise to improve results and effectiveness. In building this culture, UNDP should also improve transparency and communication at the most senior levels of the organization, to encourage and further improve openness and engagement.

The evaluation recommends that UNDP increase the involvement of the Office of Human Resources in strategic decision-making. Given the growing complexity of programme delivery, inter-agency work and collaboration with a range of partners including civil society, we recommend that investment in developing skills in leadership, relationship management and management across complex systems should be prioritized.

Although UNDP is now a leaner and more cost-conscious organization, there has been insufficient progress on results-based budgeting, and the financial sustainability of the organization is challenged by diminishing regular resources, inadequate funding models and exchange rate losses. We recommend that UNDP transition from political budgeting to a more risk- and results-based budgeting and management approach, more effectively linking results to resources. This will help mobilize funds and better highlight investment gaps to donors. UNDP is being held accountable to a corporate strategic plan without predictable and adequate resources.

Distinguished Board members and colleagues, thank you for this opportunity to set out for you the key provisions of the evaluation and our recommendations to management. I look forward to your comments and questions following presentation of the management response.

Report Links:

[Evaluation of UNDP Strategic Plan and Global and Regional Programme.](#)

[Joint Assessment of the Institutional Effectiveness of UNDP](#)