

CORPORATE & THEMATIC EVALUATION – OPTIMIZING UNDP GLOBAL PERFORMANCE



Conducting independent evaluations at the country, regional, global and corporate level is the core function of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP. Corporate and thematic evaluations (CTEs) assess UNDP’s performance in strategic areas that are critical to ensure sustained contributions to development results. They usually cover activities in multiple countries or the entire organization and may focus on UNDP policies, specific areas, partnerships, programmatic approaches, cooperation modalities, business models and operational matters. This category includes evaluations conducted jointly with other United Nations organizations to assess system-wide performance.

The purpose of the CTEs is to strengthen UNDP’s accountability to development partners, including the Executive Board, as well as to support corporate learning. By carrying out these evaluations, the IEO provides timely knowledge and lessons learned from experience that can feed into development programming at all levels.

Approach and Methodology

The objectives, scope and questions of the CTEs vary from one evaluation to another depending on the subject matter. Nevertheless, the evaluation questions always cover the central dimensions of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, and they are identified through demand analysis and stakeholder consultations.

The IEO’s evaluations apply a Theory of Change (ToC) approach that sets out how a given intervention is expected to contribute to a chain of results that will lead to the intended development impacts. When a ToC is not in place, the evaluation team develops one to guide the evaluation.

The evaluations combine various data collection and analysis methods that allow gathering quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the exercise. Methods usually include document reviews, meta-analysis and meta-synthesis of previous evaluations, regional and country case study missions, interviews and surveys, triangulation of information as well as quality assurance reviews. There have been recent changes in the methodology and processes to achieve:

- ➔ Stronger engagement with UNDP business units and stakeholders
- ➔ Increased sample sizes
- ➔ Broader accessibility to the evaluation reports.



Evolution of Corporate and Thematic Evaluations

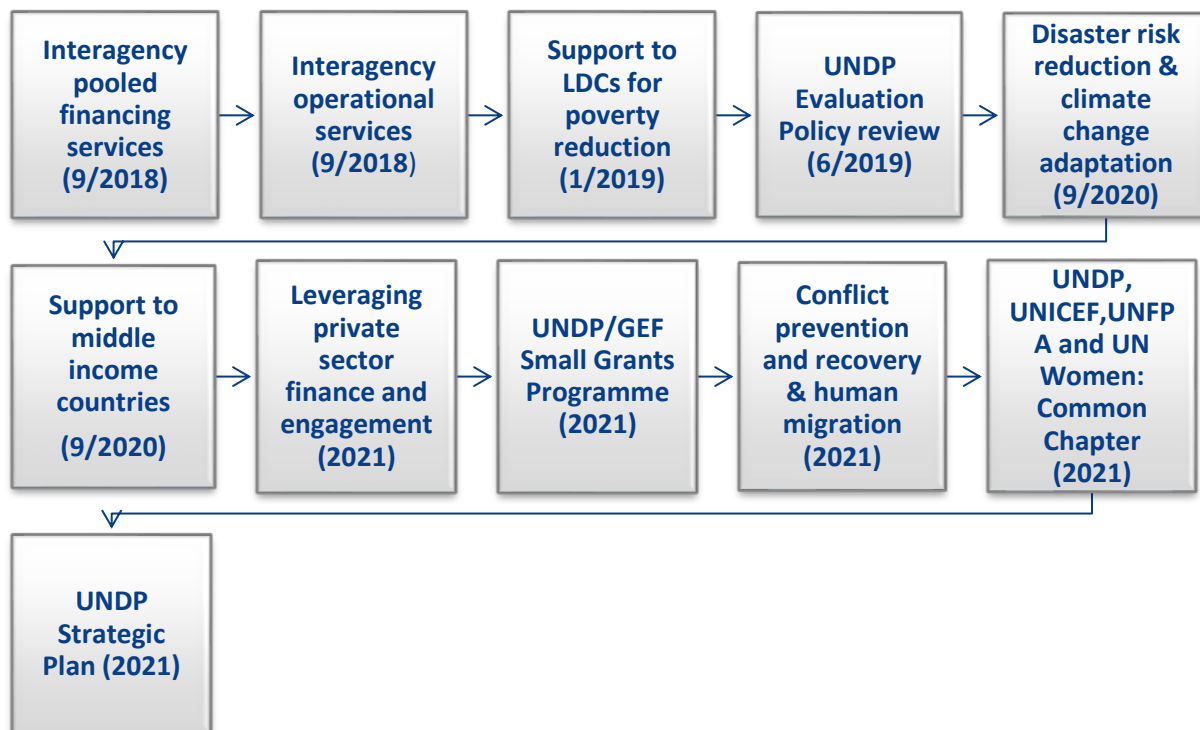
Over the past decade, the IEO has conducted over 30 CTEs approved by the Executive Board, including evaluations on the UNDP's inter-agency *operational services* and *pooled financing*, on the UNDP's *strategic plan*, the global and regional programme, its *institutional effectiveness*, and its contribution to *disability-inclusive development*.

The IEO has progressively adapted its working plan to meet the UNDP Executive Board's higher expectations, adjust to stretching resources, and consider emerging needs. The work plan for the period 2018-2021 seeks to:

- Align better the scope of corporate evaluations with the development settings defined in the UNDP's Strategic Plan.
- Cover key strategic areas for UNDP in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the reform of the United Nations Development System (UNDS).
- Use evaluations as a building block system in which independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) help inform CTEs at a regional and sub-regional level, and all together feed into a comprehensive evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan.

Corporate and Thematic Evaluation Plan 2018-2021

Building from the UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021), the IEO developed its 4-year work plan for corporate / thematic evaluations, with the expectation that each serves as a building block to the composite evaluation of UNDP results under the Strategic Plan:



Challenges Ahead

In the current changing development environment, the IEO still needs to address some challenges that affect corporate and thematic evaluation. These include the following:

- ▶ There are growing organizational demands on the IEO due to a stronger recognition of the need to promote evidence-based programming, strategic decision-making, and effective use of resources. At the same time, evaluations quality and utility must be preserved, and even improved.
- ▶ As the reform of the United Nations advances, calls for system-wide evaluation have increased, and the UN has already taken significant steps to enhance evaluation in the pursuit of more coherence in development assistance. Supporting system-wide evaluation will require greater cooperation between UN evaluation units and may add pressure on IEO human and financial resources.

The Way Forward

The Office is well positioned to deepen cooperation across the UN System given its longtime engagement with the GEF, UNCDF and UNV. Currently, the evaluation offices of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women are collaborating on an assessment of the Common Chapter of their respective 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. Those horizontal links offer opportunities to explore future cross-UN evaluation options that will be particularly important in the context of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The growing evaluation demand could require Investments to innovate evaluation designs and methods, along with a stronger focus on UNDP strategic decisions.

