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2. DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION IN UNDP

Section 2 describes the different type of decentralized evaluations carried out by UNDP programme units.

2.1. Introduction

This section gives an overview of the different evaluations implemented by UNDP programme units in line with their evaluation plans. Programme units, especially country offices, should ensure that their evaluation plans include a variety of these evaluation approaches to ensure that as broad a spectrum of evaluation results as possible is captured during the country programme cycle. This will support accountability and the capturing of experience and knowledge to strengthen work within the country, the region and the wider organization.

Evaluations undertaken by UNDP

UNDP implements a variety of evaluations at different levels and using varied approaches. Section 2 gives an overview of these evaluations and approaches, why we use these evaluations, the timing of the evaluations and how they may be carried out, as well as the use of evaluation results and links to more detailed guidance where available.

Figure 1. Types of evaluations undertaken by UNDP

UNDAF evaluations | Country programme evaluations | Outcome evaluations | Global regional programme evaluations

Project evaluations | Global Environment Facility evaluations | Multi-country or South-South project evaluations | Portfolio evaluations

Thematic evaluations | Impact evaluations | Joint evaluations | Donor- and multilateral organization programme-commissioned evaluations

Evaluation examples provided below are chosen due to their quality assessment ratings. Only evaluations with a rating of satisfactory (5) or highly satisfactory (6) were chosen. Efforts will be made to update these annually.
2.2. UNDAF evaluations

The approach to evaluations of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) is led and guided by the guidance and companion pieces that have been developed to support UNDAFs and their evaluation as well as supporting guidance from the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). This guidance is detailed in the box below. As guidance and approaches change or are updated, UNDP will make an effort to ensure the guidance detailed here is adjusted to meet current prevailing practice. However, when a programme unit is undertaking the UNDAF evaluation planning process, it should first check for the latest and most up-to-date guidance.

**UNDAF evaluation guidelines**

The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the UNEG have produced a comprehensive and ever-growing set of guidance to support the planning, implementation and use of UNDAF evaluations.

**Primary guidance** (linked for easy access)
- UNDAF guidance, 2017
- UNDAF monitoring and evaluation companion piece, 2017

**Supporting guidance** (linked for easy access)
- UNEG frequently asked questions for UNDAF evaluations, 2015
- UNEG guidance on preparing terms of reference for UNDAF evaluations, 2012
- UNEG guidance on preparing management responses for UNDAF evaluations, 2012
- UNDG results-based management handbook, 2011

**Planning, timing and funding for UNDAF evaluations**

The UNDAF evaluation should be timed to provide inputs to the preparation of the next UNDAF as well as to individual agencies’ preparation of country programme and project documents. Ideally, UNDP outcome evaluations should be timed to feed into the UNDAF evaluation and preparation in order to provide a deeper degree of reflection and lessons captured from the outcome evaluation, further strengthening the UNDAF evaluation and development process.

Given the mandatory nature of UNDAF evaluations, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) should ensure that the timing and budget for UNDAF evaluations are clearly agreed during the design phase of the UNDAF and included in workplans. The UNDAF guidelines state, “an UNDAF evaluation happens once during the life cycle of the UNDAF, with costs shared among UNCT members” and should take place during the penultimate year of the programme cycle (typically year four of a five-year cycle).

UNCTs should plan for evaluation costs and management arrangements. The UNDAF should include the estimated budget for evaluations, and the UNCT should agree on cost-sharing among team members.
**UNDAF management structure**

Early engagement in and planning for joint management arrangements will help to ensure that all agencies are clear on decision-making processes and input requirements. Clear mechanisms and resources for quality assurance should be in place throughout the evaluation process (guidance from the UNDAF monitoring and evaluation companion piece).¹ As different organizations take different approaches to evaluation, it is important to allow flexibility to adapt and additional time to accommodate delays due to such differences. Implementing agencies could: (a) agree that the evaluation will be managed using the systems and procedures from one agency; or (b) split the evaluation into components and agree whose systems will be used to manage which components. The approach taken will determine appropriate templates, budgeting norms and approaches and report finalization procedures. These approaches should be agreed upon prior to the evaluation starting.

**UNDAF evaluator recruitment**

UNDAF evaluations are jointly commissioned and managed by the heads of United Nations organizations and national Governments. They are conducted by external and independent consultants selected by mutual agreement between the United Nations and the Government through a transparent and thorough selection process. The UNDAF guidelines and the monitoring and evaluation companion guidance² give further details.

**UNDP management response to UNDAF evaluations with key actions**

The management response is a crucial step to improve the timely and effective use of evaluations. Through the management response³ process, the UNCT and evaluation stakeholders can review the UNDAF evaluation recommendations and agree on what follow-up steps and actions will be taken. It also gives the UNCT and stakeholders an opportunity to reject recommendations with justification. Management responses should clearly detail next steps, assign responsibilities and set realistic time frames and outputs where appropriate.

UNDAF evaluations and management responses issued by the UNCT are prepared in line with the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation. UNEG also gives guidance on the preparation of UNDAF management responses.⁴

The final UNDAF evaluation should be uploaded by UNDP to the Evaluation Resource Center (ERC) along with recommendations, management responses and key actions to recommendations applicable to UNDP and UNDP outcome areas as agreed by the UNCT in response to the UNDAF evaluation. Only the implementation and achievement of management responses and key actions assigned to UNDP wholly or partly will be routinely monitored and reported on through the ERC. Status updates should be prepared and provided quarterly until all planned actions have been completed.

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³ This is a new approach introduced under the 2018 Programme and project management revisions.
2.3. Country programme evaluations

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) is now undertaking independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) for all countries coming to the end of their country programme cycles. Decentralized country programme evaluations are thus no longer mandatory.

ICPEs will cover one country programme cycle and will be undertaken by IEO in the penultimate year (year prior to completion of the programme cycle). ICPEs come under the IEO plan and budget and therefore do not need to be included in programme unit evaluation plans or budgets. ICPE findings, conclusions and recommendations serve as inputs to the UNDAF evaluation process as well as the process of developing the new UNDAF and UNDP country programme. IEO will make every effort to coordinate ICPE implementation with the programme units responsible for the country programme and UNDAF development processes. ICPEs accompany new country programme documents presented to the UNDP Executive Board for approval.

Though decentralized country programme evaluations are no longer mandatory, it is highly recommended that country offices consider commissioning midterm evaluations of country programmes. A midterm evaluation gives the opportunity to review the attainment of the country programme’s intended results across all (or the majority) of outcome areas. Such an evaluation would assess the level of effectiveness in delivering the intended results as well as the positioning of UNDP. A midterm evaluation of the country programme would provide an accountability tool as well as a means to review progress and adjust direction if needed (course correction). The process is also an opportunity to have further dialogue with the Government and partners on progress by UNDP and the direction of a programme.

Similarly, regional bureaux and policy and practice units may decide to carry out midterm evaluations of their respective regional and global programmes. These midterm programme evaluations allow for mid-course adjustment of programmes.

Country programme evaluation examples (linked for easy access)

- Ghana, UNDP country programme, 2012-2017
- Niger, Evaluation mi-parcours CPAP 2014-2018
- Togo, Evaluation du CPAP, 2014 to 2018
- Cabo Verde, Common country programme final evaluation

6 Prior to 2018, ICPEs and previously assessments of development results (ADRs) covered around 25 percent of countries annually. ADRs also covered two country programme cycles. Many countries undertook country programme evaluations which were different to ADRs/ICPEs in that they usually covered a given programme cycle with a greater focus on performance at the project level. Further, decentralized country programme evaluations are commissioned by those responsible for programme management, as opposed to IEO.
2.4. Outcome evaluations

Outcome evaluations capture UNDP contributions towards outcome achievements as identified in the country programme document and directly linked to UNDAF outcomes. Outcome evaluations are undertaken to:

- Provide evidence to support accountability of programmes and for UNDP to use in its accountability requirements to its investors.
- Provide evidence of the UNDP contribution to outcomes.
- Guide performance improvement within the current global, regional and country programmes by identifying current areas of strengths, weaknesses and gaps, especially in regard to:
  - The appropriateness of the UNDP partnership strategy.
  - Impediments to the outcome being achieved.
  - Mid-course adjustments to the theory of change.
  - Lessons learned for the next programming cycle.
- Provide evidence and inform higher-level evaluations, such as ICPE, UNDAF evaluations and evaluations of regional and global programmes, and subsequent planning based on the evaluations.

It is highly recommended that country offices evaluate at least one outcome during the country programme cycle period, although this is no longer mandatory. Outcome evaluations can evaluate the contribution of all activities/projects under a specific outcome and the contribution to and achievement of a particular outcome (all projects and programmes are now linked to specific outcomes). Alternatively, some outcome evaluations may focus on a specific outcome area (e.g., rule of law or access to justice) rather than a full outcome, and focus on the contribution and achievement of projects working towards that smaller outcome area (see also portfolio evaluations).

Midterm outcome evaluations can highlight progress being achieved towards an outcome as well as provide an opportunity to identify outcome implementation challenges and may identify opportunities for course correction. Final outcome evaluations are ideally held in the penultimate year of country programme implementation prior to the ICPE and UNDAF evaluation and timed so that the findings and recommendations can support the development of the new UNDAF and UNDP country programme.

Outcome evaluations, as with all evaluations undertaken, should be implemented independently.

**Outcome evaluation examples (linked for easy access)**

- Angola, 2017, Outcome evaluation in the practice of environment and disaster risk reduction
- Ethiopia, 2016, Outcome evaluation of agriculture and private sector development
- Myanmar, Evaluation of UNDP outcome 1 (Local Governance Programme), 2013-2016
- Iraq, 2016, UNDP Evaluation of CPAP outcome 1, Government of Iraq and civil society have strengthened participatory mechanisms in place for electoral processes, national dialogue and reconciliation

2.5. Project evaluations

Project evaluations assess the performance of a project in achieving its intended results and contribution to outcomes and associated theories of change. Project evaluations yield useful
information on project implementation arrangements and the achievement of outputs and also draw linkages between a project’s outputs and its contribution to programme outcomes.

The primary purpose of a project evaluation is to make improvements; to continue or scale up an initiative; to assess sustainability and replicability in other settings; to demonstrate accountability for results; or to consider alternatives. Project evaluation budgets should be agreed with partners and stakeholders and included in project documents and plans. Project evaluations play an important role in accountability to donors and Governments involved in financing projects. For their own accountability reasons, donor agencies and other cost-sharing partners may request UNDP to include evaluation requirements in the UNDP-donor partnership agreements.

Project evaluations are mandatory when required by partnership protocols, as in the case of Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund (GCF) midterm and terminal evaluations.

To ensure accountability and learning and that results are being achieved, projects representing a significant financial investment and/or extending over a certain period should be evaluated. Project evaluations thus also become mandatory when projects are expected to reach or pass certain thresholds as indicated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANDATORY EVALUATION THRESHOLDS</th>
<th>EVALUATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects with a planned budget or actual expenditure of more than</td>
<td>Midterm and final evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects with a planned budget or actual expenditure of between</td>
<td>Midterm or final evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3 million and $5 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects with a duration of more than five years</td>
<td>At least one evaluation, midterm or final</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, projects entering a second or subsequent phase should undergo an evaluation before moving into the new phase. Equally, development initiatives being considered for scaling up should be evaluated before expansion.

In all these cases, evaluation plans and budgets should be included in project documents and plans.

Project evaluation examples (linked for easy access)

- Guinea-Bissau, 2017, Rule of law and justice
- Afghanistan, 2017, Final evaluation of the Gender Equality Project II (GEP II)
- Jordan, 2017, Final evaluation, Support to the electoral cycle in Jordan

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7 A project is entering in a second phase when it proposes to scale up results, through a substantive project revision or a new project.
2.6. Global Environment Facility, Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund evaluations

Global Environment Facility

Terminal evaluations are mandatory for all medium- and full-sized projects financed by the GEF. In addition, all full-sized GEF-financed projects must undergo midterm evaluations (MTEs) or midterm reviews (MTRs). Separate GEF guidance for terminal evaluations and MTEs/MTRs outlines the procedures and approaches that must be taken including guidance on evaluation processes, roles and responsibilities, terms of reference templates, evaluation report outlines and sample evaluation criteria matrices.

GEF midterm or terminal evaluations must be independently implemented and quality assured as the GEF Independent Evaluation Office compares the quality of terminal evaluations between GEF agencies. Joint agency projects require just one evaluation, managed by the lead agency, which adheres to GEF guidance. Both midterm and terminal evaluations should be included in UNDP evaluation plans (country office or regional bureau evaluation plans) and uploaded to the ERC.

GEF terminal and midterm evaluation and guidelines (linked for easy access)

- Guidance for conducting terminal evaluations of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed projects, 2012
- Guidance for conducting midterm reviews of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed projects

Examples of GEF terminal evaluations (linked for easy access)

- Comoros, 2017, évaluation finale du projet ACCE (Adaptation de la gestion des ressources en eau aux changements climatiques)
- Madagascar, 2017, Evaluation finale du projet "Managed Resources Protected Areas (MRPA)"
- Guatemala, 2017, Terminal Evaluation Report, promoting ecotourism to strengthen the financial sustainability of the Guatemalan Protected Areas System (SIGAP)
- China, 2017, Final Evaluation for Qinghai protected areas project

Adaptation Fund

All Adaptation Fund regular projects are subject to a final evaluation by an external evaluator selected by the implementing entity. All small-size projects as well as readiness grant projects are subject to a final evaluation if deemed appropriate by the Adaptation Fund Board and shall follow an evaluation process as decided by the Board using templates approved by the Board. Final evaluation reports will be submitted to the Adaptation Fund Board as stipulated in the project agreement. "Projects and programmes that have more than four years of implementation will conduct an independent midterm evaluation after completing the second year of implementation."

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8 GEF full-sized projects have a grant budget of more than $2 million. GEF medium-sized projects have a grant budget of up to $2 million.
9 Adaptation Fund regular projects have a grant budget over $1 million.
10 Adaptation Fund small-size projects have a grant budget up to $1 million.
Fund midterm and final evaluations should be included in UNDP evaluation plans (country office and regional bureau evaluation plans) and uploaded to the ERC.

**Green Climate Fund**

The GCF Evaluation Policy is currently under development. All GCF evaluations should be included in UNDP evaluation plans (country office or regional bureau evaluation plans) and uploaded to the ERC.

### 2.7. Multi-country or South-South cooperation projects

Multi-country projects may require evaluation. Though a single project is considered for the purpose of project management, the offices involved are accountable to contribute to joint results on equal terms. In this scenario, the modality of carrying out the evaluation is similar to a joint evaluation (see below), with the UNDP offices agreeing on management structure, collaborating in drafting the terms of reference, selecting evaluators, reporting dissemination strategies and management responses, and following up and implementing recommendations. The evaluation is managed and commissioned by the UNDP country office which is designated as the “coordination office”.

### 2.8. Portfolio evaluations

Increasingly, programme units are evaluating the work of a group or portfolio of projects with similar aims towards a country programme output or outcome. This is similar to a selective outcome evaluation although the projects themselves may straddle outcomes. For instance, a country office may evaluate the interventions contributing to strengthening governance institutions (state audit, ombudsman, etc.). This allows a few projects to contribute to a number of management costs including the evaluation rather than bearing the full cost individually. This should be planned in advance and budgets agreed across projects if needed and the approach included in the evaluation plan of the implementing unit.

### 2.9. Thematic evaluations

Thematic evaluations are sometimes implemented to assess UNDP performance in areas that are critical to ensuring sustained contribution to development results and that may cross outcome areas and areas of UNDP work. Thematic evaluations can be found at all levels and are implemented by all programme units. Thematic evaluations focus on one or more cross-cutting themes that have significance beyond a particular project or initiative and even outcome. Examples of thematic evaluations include the evaluation of UNDP initiatives in a particular results area such as democratic governance, the evaluation of a cross-cutting theme, such as capacity development or gender mainstreaming, or signature solutions in UNDP programming in a given country.

At the country office level, an office may decide to focus on its work in one area, for example gender, across all or some of its outcome areas.

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13 [https://ieu.greenclimate.fund/](https://ieu.greenclimate.fund/)
The IEO undertakes thematic evaluations as part of its mandate to look closely at the achievements and challenges of the organization.

2.10. Impact evaluations

An impact evaluation is an evaluation of the effects—positive or negative, intended or not—on individual households and institutions, and the environment caused by a given development activity such as a programme or project. Such an evaluation refers to the final (long-term) impact as well as to the (medium-term) effects at the outcome level. By identifying if development assistance is working or not, impact evaluation also serves the accountability function.

Impact evaluations do not simply measure whether objectives have been achieved or assess direct effects on intended beneficiaries. They include the full range of impacts at all levels of the results chain, including ripple effects on families, households and communities, on institutional, technical or social systems and on the environment. In terms of a simple logic model, there can be multiple intermediate (short- and medium-term) outcomes over time that eventually lead to impact, some or all of which may be included in an evaluation of impact at a specific moment in time.

UNDP undertakes very few impact evaluations as many of our projects contribute to a broader outcome or development goal or play a role for which it is difficult to attribute impact. When projects are being designed and an impact evaluation is expected, programme units should consider the type of impact that is expected and what indicators will illustrate the impact of the project towards the project’s goals. A baseline measure will give the current, pre-project levels and realistic targets can then be built into a project’s goals, monitored regularly and finally checked and validated (or not) using an impact evaluation. UNEG has detailed Impact evaluation guidance.

2.11. Joint evaluations

Joint evaluation is one modality of carrying out an evaluation to which different partners contribute. Any evaluation can be conducted as a joint evaluation. Increasingly, UNDP is being asked to undertake joint evaluations and there are various degrees of “jointness” depending on the extent to which individual partners cooperate in the evaluation process, merge their evaluation resources and combine their evaluation reporting. Joint evaluations tend to be lengthier in process and require greater coordination efforts. Other advantages and disadvantages should be discussed both internally and with stakeholders.

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14 Between 2016 and 2017, UNDP implemented 600 decentralized evaluations, which included only one impact evaluation.

At the country level, an obvious example of a joint evaluation is the UNDAF evaluation, in which a number of United Nations organizations and the Government participate. In addition, a UNDP country office may jointly carry out, together with the partner Government or with a donor, a joint outcome evaluation that assesses where both parties are mutually and equally responsible for the evaluation exercise. General guidance on joint evaluations has been produced by UNEG.\textsuperscript{16}

Joint evaluations come with both benefits and challenges and these should be strongly considered before venturing into a joint evaluation. Benefits include strengthened harmonization and donor coordination, possible reduced transactions costs, increased legitimacy and objectivity, broader scope, greater learning and enhanced ownership. However, challenges faced could include coordination issues as well as a low level of buy-in.\textsuperscript{17} Programme units should be realistic about the challenges and benefits that joint evaluations bring.

Joint evaluations follow the same approach as other evaluations, with the added step of having each step agreed by multiple parties. These steps are described in brief in the figure below, and in more detail in the annex. All steps need to be agreed between all parties to ensure smooth running of a joint evaluation.

\textbf{Figure 2. Joint evaluation implementation steps}

- Deciding the need for a joint evaluation: does a project warrant a joint evaluation?
- Determining partners: early identification of joint evaluation partners.
- Management structure: is a joint steering committee required?
- Division of work: what are the decision-making structures and responsibilities.
- Drafting the terms of reference (TOR): who will “hold the pen” in the finalization of the TOR?
- Determining whose procedures will be used: agreement on whose administrative or evaluation approached will be followed.
- Funding modalities: whose funding modalities will be followed?

\textsuperscript{16} Access at \url{http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1620}

2.12. Donor- and multilateral organization-commissioned evaluations

Donor-funded projects and programmes may require evaluations (final or midterm) and these must be planned in advance and included in project documents. If evaluations are mandatory, this will be stated in the agreement between UNDP and the donor, and the timing and funding source will be agreed at the time of project finalization and signing. These evaluations may be commissioned directly by the donor agencies and UNDP or are sometimes commissioned only by the donor agencies themselves.

These evaluations should be included in programme units’ evaluation plans and uploaded to the ERC. It should be communicated to the donor that all UNDP evaluations are treated as public documents and will be uploaded to the ERC. Where an evaluation is not planned and has not been included in the evaluation plan, the plan must be revised to include the new evaluation and this must be uploaded to the ERC.

Evaluation commissioned by donors should be planned and completed in a collaborative manner between UNDP and donors. The scope and methodology of the evaluation must be planned, and procedural matters are to be agreed upon in advance by the donor and UNDP. UNDP should ensure that donor partners share the draft report for comment prior to final issuance and completion.

Recommendations, management responses and key actions which are specifically applicable to UNDP and the programme unit should be uploaded to the ERC within six weeks of completion of the evaluation report. Other non-UNDP related recommendations, etc., can be omitted from the ERC, though they remain in the evaluation report. The programme unit needs to monitor the implementation and report on the progress of the planned key actions until they have all been completed.
Annex. Joint evaluation consideration checklist

Deciding on the need for a joint evaluation

It is important to assess whether the programme or project warrants a joint evaluation.
- Is the focus of the programme on an outcome that reaches across sectors and agencies?
- Is the programme co-financed by multiple partners?
- Would a joint evaluation reduce evaluation transaction costs?
- Can the project be evaluated (evaluability)?

Determining partners

Choose evaluation partners at an early stage to ensure their involvement and ownership.

Management structure

A recommended structure for a joint evaluation could have a steering group that oversees the evaluation process and a smaller management group to ensure smooth implementation.
- The steering group comprises a representative from each partner organization and government entity.
- The steering group approves the terms of reference (TOR) and the evaluation team ensures oversight of the evaluation, introduces balance in the final evaluation judgements and takes responsibility for the use of results.

Division of work

Senior management of the UNDP programme unit should agree with the evaluation partners on the decision-making arrangements and the division of labour at the outset of the evaluation process.
- This includes who in the management group takes the lead role in each of the subsequent steps in the evaluation.
- A conflict resolution process should be determined to deal with any problems that may arise.

Drafting the TOR

It is practical for one party to take the lead in drafting the evaluation TOR, which define the scope of work. The draft should be discussed and agreed upon by the partner organizations and the interests of all parties concerned should be included and agreed in the TOR.
Determining whose procedures will be used

Different organizations take different approaches to evaluation, and it is important to allow flexibility to adapt and allow additional time to accommodate delays due to such differences. Implementing agencies could:
- Agree that the evaluation will be managed using the systems and procedures of one agency;
or
- Split the evaluation into components and agree whose systems will be used to manage which components.

Whichever approach is taken will determine appropriate templates, budgeting norms and approaches and report finalization procedures. These approaches should be agreed prior to the evaluation starting.

Funding modalities

If UNDP is taking the lead, the preferred funding approach should be to pool partners’ financial support into a fund (akin to a trust fund) that is administered by one agency and that covers all costs related to the exercise. Alternatively, individual partner(s) could finance certain components of the evaluation while UNDP covers others. This approach increases transaction and coordination costs.

Selecting evaluators

One of the joint evaluation partners could take responsibility for recruiting the evaluation team, in consultation with the other partners. Another option is for each of the partners to contribute their own experts. However, an evaluation team leader should be hired and agreed by partners to aid the smooth implementation, organization and final report development of the evaluation. Guidance on evaluator recruitment can be found in section 5.

Report dissemination strategies

For a joint evaluation, partners should agree that they have the opportunity to correct factual errors in the report; where it is impossible to resolve differences on the findings and conclusions, dissenting views should be included in the report; and the conclusions and recommendations should be the responsibility of the evaluators. However, sometimes measures such as allowing for separate evaluation products may be beneficial for the partners who have certain accountability or reporting requirements.

Management response, follow-up and implementing recommendations

All managers must follow up on the findings and recommendations of each evaluation report in UNDP. Partners need to agree on what to do individually and collectively and decide upon a follow-up mechanism that monitors the status of the changes being implemented. In line with the Evaluation Policy requirement, UNDP may select recommendations that are pertinent to UNDP and prepare a management response focusing on these recommendations.