



**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, 2022

Summary

The annual report on evaluation presents the status of evaluations undertaken in 2022 by UNDP, the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the United Nations Volunteers programme. The report synthesizes key findings on the work of UNDP and lessons learned from evaluations and the *Reflections* series. The report documents UNDP efforts in strengthening decentralized evaluations and highlights considerable improvement in completion rates compared to previous years, while quality has remained mixed. It reflects the investments made by the Independent Evaluation Office in innovative practices and tools, including artificial intelligence, to manage knowledge and extract lessons. The leadership and early contributions of UNDP to evaluative syntheses of achievements against the Sustainable Development Goals are highlighted.

Elements of a decision

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



I. Introduction

A. Overview

1. Against the backdrop of the multiple challenges affecting the international community – the urgency of the climate crisis, worsening insecurity and conflict in several parts of the world and levels of global inequality matching those of the early twentieth century – a mature, respected and well-capacitated evaluation function plays a paramount contributing role in the promotion of effective multilateralism.
2. At the halfway point towards the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals, the Independent Evaluation Office is seeking new ways to support evidence-based decision-making through its vast programme of work. Further to the regular implementation of its multi-year programme of work, as approved by the Executive Board, it is building on both a more fruitful use of its rich evaluation database and stronger partnerships in the United Nations system and the development community. In 2022, the office launched the SDG Synthesis Coalition to identify the results achieved and the lessons learned in programme implementation against the Goals and their targets in the five pillars of peace, people, prosperity, planet and partnerships.

B. Engagement with the Executive Board

3. The Independent Evaluation Office has continued to engage regularly with the Executive Board, the custodian of the evaluation policy, through formal and informal dialogue sessions. In 2022, the office presented Member States with the 2021 annual report on evaluation and three evaluations on UNDP support for youth economic empowerment, UNDP support to energy access and transition and a report on financing the recovery: a formative evaluation of the UNDP response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and Sustainable Development Goal financing.
4. The office also shared with the Executive Board 24 independent country programme evaluations to inform the Board's decision-making ahead of the approval of UNDP country programme documents (CPDs).¹ In the case of country offices whose independent country programme evaluations had been cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the office offered technical and/or financial support for decentralized country programme evaluations. Four country offices accepted this offer.²
5. In September 2022, the President, Vice-President and three members of the Executive Board participated in an Independent Evaluation Office retreat session to discuss ways to enhance the engagement of Member States with UNDP oversight functions, including the Office of Audit and Investigations and the Ethics Office.

¹ Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mozambique, South Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia (Africa); India, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Viet Nam (Asia and the Pacific); Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic (Arab States); Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan (Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States); Barbados and Eastern Caribbean, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Peru (Latin America and the Caribbean).

² Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Suriname and Thailand. Six other country offices (Guyana, Jordan, Libya, Niger, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago) did not respond to the offer or were not in a position to accept it. The Independent Evaluation Office had already carried out an evaluation of the Yemen country programme in 2018, before the programme was extended multiple times.

C. Engagement with UNDP senior management

6. Throughout 2022, the Independent Evaluation Office met with the UNDP Executive Group on thematic and strategic evaluations. These sessions constituted an important opportunity to reinforce the dialogue between the office and UNDP management, providing valuable feedback to inform the future work of the organization.

7. Through its capacity development section and its network of regional focal points, the Independent Evaluation Office has closely collaborated with UNDP management to enhance both oversight and technical support towards improving the planning, quality and coverage of decentralized evaluations. Regional focal points have participated as observers in 10 meetings of the Programme Appraisal Committee, which assesses draft CPDs against quality standards for programming. This helps to ensure that planning documents take into account recommendations from recent independent country programme evaluations.

8. As part of its strategy for 2021-2025, the Independent Evaluation Office has appointed seven staff members as thematic focal points for the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, COVID-19 support and digitalization. The focal points closely followed the evolution of UNDP work in different areas, contributing to enhancing the office's understanding of UNDP practices and programmes for better evaluation quality.

D. Advisory bodies

9. In 2022, the Independent Evaluation Office liaised regularly with the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee and the Director presented the office's work at three meetings with the Committee.

10. All evaluations conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office were peer-reviewed by thematic and country-level experts, hired individually or as members of research centres and think tanks.

11. The Independent Evaluation Office sought ethical approval from an external review board for its engagement with marginalized communities as part of the formative evaluation of the integration by UNDP of the principles of leaving no one behind. The process included the preparation of a protection protocol for human subjects and data privacy provisions, the creation of verbal informed consent from all participants, and electronic written consent from civil society survey participants. All evaluators contracted for the evaluation signed the United Nations Evaluation Group Pledge of Commitment to Ethical Conduct in Evaluation, and field-level staff received two bespoke trainings on ethical data collection to follow the guidelines. Other thematic and independent country programme evaluations also adopted these practices.

II. Independent Evaluation Office outputs, 2022

A. Overview

12. In line with its multi-year programme of work 2022-2025, in 2022 the Independent Evaluation Office completed three thematic evaluations:

- (a) The formative evaluation of the integration by UNDP of the principles of leaving no one behind, which assessed the extent to which UNDP applied an equality, equity and non-discrimination focus to its strategies and programming ([DP/2023/8](#));

- (b) The evaluation of UNDP support to social protection, which assessed the results of UNDP support to country-owned social protection mechanisms in terms of mitigating the effects of multiple deprivations and socioeconomic exclusion for those most at risk of being left behind (DP/2023/17);
- (c) The evaluation of UNDP support to access to justice, which assessed the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of UNDP in enabling individuals and communities in seeking and obtaining proper treatment of their grievances (DP/2023/19).

The evaluations, presented to the Executive Board at its first and annual sessions of 2023, aimed to contribute to the comprehensive coverage of all aspects of the UNDP mandate,³ with a particular focus on assessing the UNDP contributions to recovery, equity and non-discrimination and reimagining more sustainable and resilient development pathways.

13. In 2022, the Independent Evaluation Office conducted 13 independent country programme evaluations, as planned, covering three regions and \$1.47 billion of the UNDP annual budget. The office also completed four evaluations begun in late 2021. Most independent country programme evaluations covered African countries (see table 1).

Table 1
Independent country programme evaluations and reviews, 2022

<i>Region</i>	<i>Evaluations</i>	
Africa	Benin	Malawi
	Burundi	Namibia
	Cabo Verde*	Senegal
	Equatorial Guinea	Sierra Leone
	Guinea*	Togo
	Lesotho	
Arab States	Programme of assistance to the Palestinian people	
Asia and the Pacific	Bhutan	Pacific multi-country office*
	Cambodia	Philippines
Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	-	
Latin America and the Caribbean	The Plurinational State of Bolivia*	

*Evaluations started in 2021.

14. Based on a growing demand for concise and aggregated evaluation evidence,⁴ the Independent Evaluation Office completed a second regional synthesis, this one focusing on UNDP work in the Sahel. It reflected on more than 180 project and country programme evaluations conducted and commissioned by UNDP in the 10 countries covered by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. The next regional synthesis, of UNDP work in the Caribbean, is ongoing and will be finalized in 2023.

15. Through the *Reflections* series, launched in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic to identify lessons from previous crises that could help decision makers move forward, the Independent Evaluation Office continued to offer rapid assessments of evaluative information and insights on “what works and in what contexts”. In 2022, the office published four *Reflections* papers on e-governance; boosting women’s political participation; engaging civil society organizations (CSOs); and supporting environmental justice.

³ Executive Board decision 2017/21.

⁴ Decision 2020/15,

B. Key findings and lessons learned

Signature solution 1 – Poverty and inequality

16. The extent to which UNDP contributed to inclusive and job-rich pathways for green recovery and development continues to vary greatly by country. UNDP implemented many projects in this area which achieved important results, most notably in terms of fostering entrepreneurship, promoting youth and women's economic empowerment, supporting public infrastructure initiatives and engaging in agricultural and green growth programming. Demonstrating the clear impact of UNDP work for the most marginalized populations remains difficult, however, given the often small scale and fragmented nature of projects.
17. Evaluations revealed a shift in the UNDP work on data and analytics away from a focus on poverty towards considering overlapping vulnerabilities. However, these data have rarely been used to support future programme planning at country level. The “inequality shift” promoted from headquarters (with increased attention paid to the informal economy and social protection programming) is not yet visible in most of the independent country programme evaluations reviewed. The thematic evaluation of UNDP support to social protection, presented to the Executive Board at its annual session 2023, noted that UNDP has set out a comprehensive human development vision for its social protection programming. Current programming was found to be overly fragmented, with too many small-scale interventions disproportionately carried out in middle-income countries.

Signature solution 2 – Governance

18. Independent country programme evaluations showed that national stakeholders much appreciated the UNDP work in the areas of governance, justice, rule of law and human rights. The thematic evaluation of UNDP support to access to justice (2023) highlighted the UNDP value addition in this regard, specifically in fragile and post-conflict countries. Evaluations noted that UNDP support led to the achievement of many positive results, e.g., in terms of enhanced efficiency through e-governance processes. Marginalized populations were sometimes reached with good results. All in all, group-by-group approaches prevailed, with targeted populations determined by national priorities or donor interest rather than based on the evidence produced by UNDP. Programme effectiveness was often challenged by political crises and the magnitude of the tasks at hand. Short project cycles, restricted coverage and limited partnerships hindered the sustainability of results and national ownership.

Signature solution 3 – Resilience

19. UNDP was able to make significant contributions towards peace, conflict prevention and social cohesion in some of the country programmes assessed in 2022. Interventions were deemed appropriate and aligned with country priorities, humanitarian standards and international good practice, while some gaps in the coherence of planning and management were noted. In some settings, the COVID-19 pandemic led to delays in programme implementation and constrained progress, whereas in others it presented an opportunity to strengthen the UNDP strategic position. There are several positive findings on the ability of UNDP to rapidly and effectively pivot to reprioritize programming in response to the global pandemic. Inter-agency partnerships, synergies with the rest of the UNDP country programme and availability of funding were the most cited factors affecting performance under the resilience portfolio.

Signature solution 4 – Environment

20. UNDP implemented solid, relevant programmes in the areas of climate change, environmental protection and disaster risk management in diverse settings. These often contributed to building the knowledge and skills of different stakeholder groups by increasing their engagement and contributions to the review of national policies and processes such as nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans. In some contexts, UNDP successfully engaged in integrating livelihoods and poverty eradication into environment portfolio interventions. Programme coherence – both internally and vis-à-vis outcome-level targets – has been identified as a challenge. Staff turnover, inconsistent communication and the lack of political will also reduced the efficiency and effectiveness of UNDP work in some settings.

Signature solution 5 – Energy

21. UNDP is delivering relevant energy initiatives that are aligned with national energy priorities. Its neutrality and impartiality are of particular value because of the national importance of energy security and the geopolitical dimensions surrounding energy supply. The UNDP contributions to enhanced energy access for rural people, women, the elderly and the populations left furthest behind are becoming increasingly visible in independent country programme evaluations. UNDP support for the development of renewable energy solutions varied in scope, scale and effectiveness. Results have yet to prove sustainable, but many ongoing initiatives successfully reached some of the populations most at risk of being left behind. The ability of UNDP to leverage donor funds and stimulate private sector investments has been mixed, and some programmes were reported to have missed opportunities in terms of programme design.

Signature solution 6 – Gender equality

22. Many of the gender-related findings included in independent country programme evaluations conducted in 2022 are varied. Despite shrinking civil space in some countries, moderately positive results were noted in interventions aimed at promoting women's political and economic empowerment. The coordination among United Nations agencies to address sexual and gender-based violence was stronger than in the past. However, the lack of focus on addressing the root causes of gender inequality and discrimination often negatively affected the effectiveness of programmes. While some evaluations noted stronger staff awareness and capacities in the realm of gender-responsive programming, others highlighted a weak application of gender concepts and siloed work of gender specialists within projects.

Lessons learned from the *Reflections* series

23. **Data-driven programme design is key to success. “Best in class” UNDP programmes learn incrementally over time, integrating new forms of knowledge and leveraging existing expertise.** A thorough understanding of the thematic and country context through various analytical exercises, needs assessments and evaluations were essential elements of success in UNDP programming. The development of detailed socioeconomic impact assessments provided critical support for UNDP to respond and promote recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustainable programmes built on analytical insights into the political dynamics of aid and carried out initial analyses of potential hurdles in implementation, along with looking for risk-mitigation strategies. They also took advantage of existing knowledge, often building on indigenous expertise and skills.

24. **The success of UNDP interventions at the community level hinges on careful attention to immediate needs, localized presence and customized attention to**

communication. Local- and community-level interventions were most effective when they combined addressing long-term community priorities and immediate needs. For example, biodiversity conservation projects were successful when they also improved food security. Successful local-level initiatives also fostered community participatory processes in project design, implementation and monitoring, often through the involvement of community-based organizations. Reflecting the local context was also key in communication: many effective interventions customized the format and language and used the media sources most widely consumed in the targeted communities.

25. UNDP accelerates results or achieves more sustainable outcomes for women and populations at risk of being left behind when paying attention to intersecting vulnerabilities and to cultural and social aspects of marginalization. UNDP programmes used a range of methods to identify those left behind, but when identification was done on an ad hoc basis or based on donor preference, some populations at risk of being left behind were missed. Similarly, addressing intersecting factors of disadvantage through programming generally remained challenging, as did addressing entrenched social norms and power structures that deny marginalized individuals or groups the agency to make certain decisions and thus benefit fully from the interventions. Evidence shows that altering these structural issues requires specific considerations in the design and implementation phase; long-term substantive support; and consideration for context-specific opportunities for structural transformation.

26. Integrated approaches can lead to stronger and more durable results, but convincing partners to move away from sectoral approaches is still challenging. Many successful UNDP programmes achieved results through strengthening linkages by simultaneously working at the policy level (upstream) and with people on the ground (downstream). The adoption of new legislation or policies could accelerate results for populations that received simultaneous direct support, or support changes happening in a related area. UNDP was more successful in achieving integrated results when it entered into partnership with multiple government ministries or included municipal-level authorities and, in certain contexts, with civil society actors.

27. Sustainable development financing is best achieved through the diversification of funding channels, including private sector engagement. By leveraging multi-donor funding, UNDP fostered the diversification of funding streams, which helped to strengthen national capacities to access multiple development finance streams and to mobilize other investments. There are also some successful cases of leveraging private sector funds, for example in the areas of renewable energy and livelihoods. Funds diversification also included the option of adding fees, tariffs or other types of non-financial contributions, which were successful when they kept the services broadly accessible.

III. Oversight and support to decentralized evaluation

A. Investment in evaluation

28. UNDP reported the following expenditures for 2022. Country offices spent \$23.20 million on evaluation. This included evaluation implementation costs (\$10.8 million),⁵ staff costs (\$8.8 million) and additional evaluation-related costs

⁵ Based on Evaluation Resource Centre data downloaded on 1 February 2023.

(\$3.6 million).⁶ Expenditure at headquarters and by regional bureaux in implementing, supporting and overseeing evaluation amounted to \$1.9 million, including evaluation costs (\$700,000), staff costs (\$1.17 million) and additional evaluation expenditures (\$20,000). These figures are based on self-reporting and should therefore be treated as estimates. Going forward, greater efforts should be made to independently verify the reliability of reported expenditure figures.

29. While funding for the Independent Evaluation Office has shown increased alignment with the evaluation policy objectives⁷ (see also table 2 below), funding for decentralized evaluations continues to fall short. Analyses by the office show that funding per report often stays below the threshold required for commissioning credible and usable evaluations, while staff time allocation and associated costs are increasing.

B. Decentralized evaluation support

30. The commitment of UNDP to strengthening its decentralized evaluation function is reflected in an information note, “A road map for strengthening decentralized evaluations in UNDP”, presented to the Executive Board at its request at the 2022 annual session. The road map details the work of UNDP and the Independent Evaluation Office to strengthen the decentralized evaluation function around two pillars and 18 interventions.

31. The Independent Evaluation Office continued to support stronger decentralized evaluations through its capacity development section and regional focal points, who maintained a close and continued dialogue with regional bureaux and country offices. As part of this greater strategic engagement, the regional focal points participated in 10 Programme Appraisal Committee meetings in 2022, reviewing the inclusion of past recommendations from independent country programme evaluations in new CPDs and the quality of accompanying evaluation plans. The focal points also provided technical support to decentralized country programme evaluations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Papua New Guinea.

32. In partnership with regional bureaux, the Independent Evaluation Office trained more than 190 staff and monitoring and evaluation focal points in country offices in the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean regions. In 2022, 206 UNDP staff completed the organizational course on evaluation, bringing to 1,107 the total number of course completions. The office also offered 14 scholarships for UNDP monitoring and evaluation staff to virtually attend the 2022 International Program for Development Evaluation Training. Attendees shared their learning with the wider network of UNDP focal points through regular “ask us anything” sessions. In addition, 57 UNDP staff joined government and CSO partners at the 2022 National Evaluation Capacities Conference and participated in the rich offering of workshops and conference sessions.

33. All UNDP programme and policy bureaux have developed bureau-specific strategies for strengthening decentralized evaluations and started implementation in January 2022. All bureaux reported quarterly on their performance throughout 2022 through the established Organizational Performance Group review and decision process. In 2022, UNDP reviewed evaluation-related standards in the quality assurance checklist for formulation of new CPDs, and started updating the guidance documents on programme and project management and programme and operations policies and procedures related to evaluation in line with UNDP evaluation guidelines.

⁶ 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 reported per Evaluation Resource Centre data downloaded on 1 February 2023.

⁷ As per the revised evaluation policy (DP/2019/29).

UNDP reviewed the quality, robustness and coverage of 37 new evaluation plans as part of the quality assurance process for CPDs through the Programme Appraisal Committee reviews.

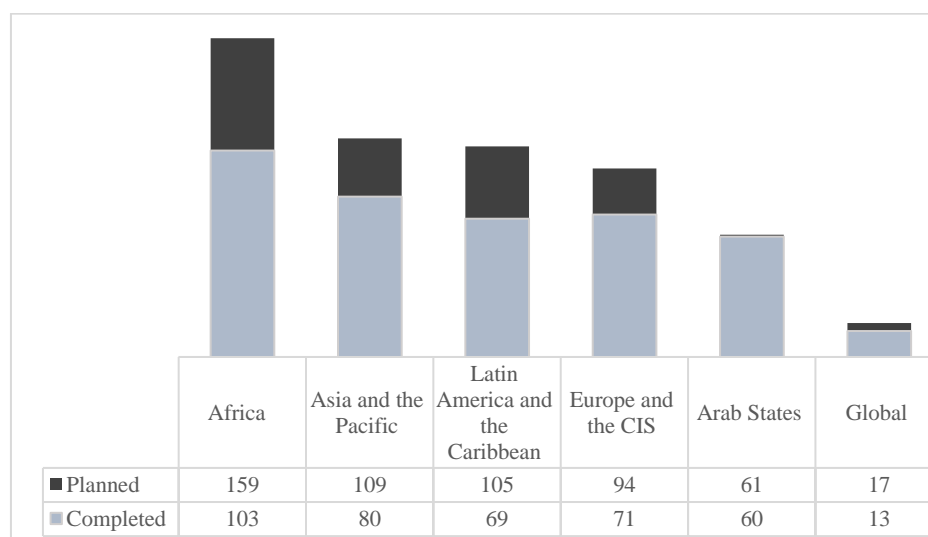
34. To track the real-time progress of evaluation performance, UNDP has institutionalized the regular review and follow-up to the bureaux with data analytics once per quarter using the evaluation scorecard and Evaluation Resource Centre data. In 2022, the Organizational Performance Group met three times to review UNDP performance on decentralized evaluation and to urge bureaux to take proactive measures to lift the quality and timeliness of evaluations.

35. In response to the Executive Board's request to continue improving the quality and credibility of UNDP decentralized evaluations at country level and enable greater independent oversight of this work,⁸ the Independent Evaluation Office has planned for the expansion of its presence at the regional level, following a hiatus due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The expansion will be operationalized in 2023.

C. Decentralized evaluation implementation, quality and use

36. UNDP planned to conduct 545 decentralized evaluations in 2022.⁹ Of these, 396 evaluations (73 per cent) were completed, a considerable improvement compared to previous years.¹⁰ The performance of the Bureau for Arab States is to be highlighted, with 98 per cent of its planned evaluations conducted. Completion rates by country offices in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean, while having improved, remain below 70 per cent (see figure 1).

Figure I
UNDP decentralized evaluations by region, 2022



CIS= Commonwealth of Independent States; Source: UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre

37. Quality assessment scores have shown marginal improvement over the years, but the overall picture remains mixed. In 2022, of 307 evaluations quality assessed by the Independent Evaluation Office, 41 per cent were satisfactory, 48 per cent were

⁸ Decision 2019/19.

⁹ Based on Evaluation Resource Centre data downloaded on 1 March 2022.

¹⁰ Based on Evaluation Resource Centre data downloaded on 1 February 2023. The implementation rate for 2021 was 63 per cent.

moderately satisfactory and 11 per cent were moderately unsatisfactory or unsatisfactory. At the regional level, evaluations from country offices in the Arab States region continue to show a high level of quality and further improvement over 2021, with 60 per cent of evaluations being satisfactory. The Asia and Pacific region follows, with 47 per cent of evaluations being of satisfactory quality. Evaluation quality remains a challenge in other regions, with Latin America and the Caribbean seeing a decline with only 23 per cent of evaluations being satisfactory. This suggests that a more radical approach is needed to achieve a step change and markedly improve the quality of decentralized evaluations at UNDP.

38. As part of the roll-out of the road map for strengthening decentralized evaluations, in 2022 the office produced draft guidelines for project performance ratings to be included as part of the decentralized evaluation process, which will be tested and finalized in 2023.

39. The second edition of the Evaluation Excellence Awards in 2022 recognized the high quality of six evaluations by the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP country offices in Benin, Fiji and Sri Lanka, and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (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.

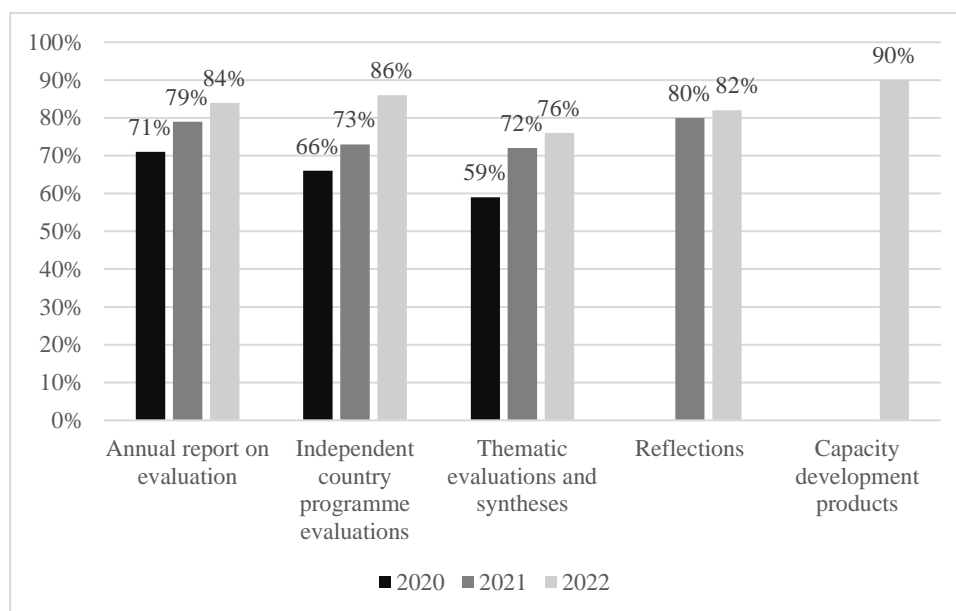
D. Gender-responsive evaluations

40. The Independent Evaluation Office fully incorporates the evaluation performance indicator of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in its quality assessment system. An analysis of all UNDP evaluations quality-checked by the 2022 cut-off date (n=202) found a mean evaluation performance indicator score of 10.11, signalling that UNDP evaluations exceeded the requirements of the System-wide Action Plan for the third consecutive year. The analysis showed a considerable improvement in the inclusion of gender in both the evaluations of the Independent Evaluation Office and decentralized evaluations.

IV. Use of evaluations

41. The Independent Evaluation Office periodically canvasses a wide range of stakeholders on their views of the work of the Office and quality of evaluation reports and publications. The respondents to the 2022 stakeholders survey showed appreciation for all the evaluative outputs by the Independent Evaluation Office, with the capacity development products and events, independent country programme evaluations and the annual report on evaluations for 2021 receiving the best assessment. All outputs of the office were considered useful, with more than three quarters of respondents “strongly satisfied” or “satisfied” with each product. Stakeholders’ satisfaction has been consistently rising for all outputs over the past three years (see figure 2).

Figure II
Stakeholder perceptions of the utility of Independent Evaluation Office outputs, 2020-2022



Source: Independent Evaluation Office, stakeholder surveys

42. Analysis of data from the Evaluation Resource Centre confirms that UNDP has implemented the majority (73 per cent) of key actions included in the management responses to independent and decentralized evaluations from 2018 to 2022. The result is in line with evidence from previous years. The great majority of surveyed stakeholders provided positive feedback on recommendations issued in thematic and country programme evaluations, the level of satisfaction in 2022 being higher than in 2020 and 2021. The perceived strengths of the recommendations lie in their impartiality and clarity, with some room for improvement as regards their actionability. Stakeholders reported that the recommendations by the Independent Evaluation Office are a useful reference for their own work.

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

A. United Nations Capital Development Fund

43. In 2022, UNCDF maintained its commitment to independent evaluations, spending a total of \$870,606 (0.85 per cent) of combined programmatic resources on evaluation, thus approaching the 1 per cent target set out in the UNDP evaluation policy. The UNCDF Evaluation Unit continued to produce high-quality evaluations, as recognized through two 2022 Evaluation Excellence Awards.

44. The UNCDF Evaluation Unit completed three evaluations in 2022, namely the midterm evaluation of the joint UNCDF-UNDP local government initiative on climate change in Bangladesh; the final evaluation of the digital financial services project in Sierra Leone; and the midterm evaluation of the development initiative in Northern Uganda programme.

45. The midterm evaluation of the programme in Bangladesh focused on local climate change adaptation in vulnerable districts through gender-sensitive approaches. The evaluation findings confirmed the relevance and coherence of the initiative vis-à-vis national and global priorities and policy frameworks, as well as its importance for local governments facing various climate hazards. Capacity-building and training have improved understanding of climate change, while the Performance-Based Climate Resilience Grant and Community Resilience Fund promoted transparency and accountability. The effectiveness of the intervention was strongly influenced by the level of decentralization and the nature of engagement with other relevant departments for coordination and convergence. The evaluation concluded that the initiative contributed to changing the mindset of local governments on the importance of including climate adaptation in local planning, budgeting and investments. It improved the “voice” of women and overall had a positive impact on the lives of beneficiaries. Sustainability and mainstreaming in the government systems, however, appear weak due to the short period of intervention and the delivery disruptions caused by the pandemic, among other reasons. Recommendations included the need to strengthen mainstreaming within government systems and build strong formalized linkages with relevant line departments at the national and local levels; build the capacity of local CSOs; and develop a policy-influencing strategy.

46. The final evaluation of the digital financial services project in Sierra Leone, which aimed at strengthening the financial sector and widening financial inclusion through the provision of digital financial services by market actors, emphasized the relevance of the support provided to the Central Bank, the close alignment of the intervention to government policy on financial sector reform, and the complementarity of support provided by the World Bank. The project made a significant contribution to strengthening institutional capacity to formulate and implement the fintech regulatory framework. However, coordination issues were identified, particularly regarding the technical assistance for drafting regulations. While the project enabled the UNCDF to develop trusted relationships, the fintech innovations supported had yet to result in a significant increase in access to financial services, due to low penetration of smartphones, technical integration issues and regulatory obstacles. The evaluation recommended that future work should combine financial support for technical innovation with brokering and networking which can link fintech innovators with potential commercial partners.

47. The UNCDF has actively contributed to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). The UNCDF Head of Evaluation continued to serve as one of the Executive Vice-Chairs of the Group, overseeing normative work and coordinating the newly-launched UNEG Membership Committee. Evaluation Unit staff also contributed to the work of the policy evaluation working group.

B. United Nations Volunteers programme

48. The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) budget for evaluation in 2022 was \$92,225, drawn from regular (core) and other (non-core) resources. The budget covered capacity-building as well as the costs of the evaluation team at UNV headquarters.

49. In line with its Strategic Framework, 2022-2025, UNV finalized a new evaluation plan that reflects refreshed priorities. Scoping exercises for all three planned thematic evaluations were conducted. Two thematic evaluations will be conducted in 2023 to assess: (a) the online and on-site volunteer categories that constitute the UNV offer to its partners; and (b) the UNV contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment. An independent evaluation of the Strategic Framework will be completed in 2025 to inform the development of the next framework (2026-2029).

50. Supported by the Independent Evaluation Office, UNV continued to provide technical advice and quality assurance to decentralized evaluations throughout 2022. This included facilitating the drafting and tracking of management responses. UNV continues to collaborate with the Independent Evaluation Office on including information on UN Volunteers and volunteerism in the evaluations conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office that touch on areas of the UNV specialization.

VI. Advancing global evaluation culture and practice

A. The Global Evaluation Initiative

51. Co-founded by the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group and the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office in 2020, the Global Evaluation Initiative has continued supporting the strengthening of monitoring and evaluations systems and the use of evidence in developing countries through advisory services, capacity development and knowledge creation. In 2022, the initiative strengthened its collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank and explored opportunities to expand its outreach in the Middle East and North Africa region. The initiative also established a new partnership with the Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan.

52. The initiative launched four new monitoring and evaluation system analyses or diagnostics in Bhutan, Gabon, the Solomon Islands and the City of Recife, Brazil. Capacity development and advisory services were provided in partnership with CLEAR¹¹ Centres in more than 20 countries to support the elaboration of normative instruments and practical tools, and the consolidation of monitoring and evaluation governance structures.

53. The Global Evaluation Initiative network continued to provide global, regional, country and institutional-level training and professional development activities to key monitoring and evaluation audiences. Among them, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training attracted 137 participants (nearly 60 per cent of them representing developing countries) and was supplemented by six online workshops which allowed the programme to expand its reach including to 12 countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence. Scholarships awarded by the initiative enabled 72 participants (70 per cent of them women) to take part in the programmes. The Global Education Initiative also convened the [gLOCAL](#) Evaluation Week 2022, a knowledge-sharing event gathering the international monitoring and evaluation community for nearly 400 events hosted by 231 institutions from 53 countries in all regions. More than 15,000 participants registered for events.

B. The National Evaluation Capacities Conference

54. Over 300 participants from more than 100 countries – representing national Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, international development and humanitarian agencies, civil society and the international evaluation community — gathered in Turin from 25 to 28 October 2022 to discuss the strengthening of national evaluation systems to inform policy and other decision-making in a rapidly changing world.

55. The focus of the conference, “Resilient National Evaluation Systems for Sustainable Development”, emphasized the importance of sharing progress and lessons learned for strengthening national evaluation systems. Discussions underlined the essential role of these systems for countries to “build forward better” and get back on track towards the Sustainable Development Goals. By adopting the Turin Agenda,

¹¹ Centres for Learning on Evaluation and Results.

participants committed to strengthen inclusive and transparent evaluation systems which engage with stakeholders and incorporate their diverse viewpoints to generate credible evidence for policies and programmes to leave no one behind, rapidly and sustainably. The need to account for the current and projected impact of policies and programmes on climate and ecosystems was also emphasized, in order to help avoid, mitigate and address the existential crises affecting the planet and human development. After the National Evaluation Capacities Conference, the Global Evaluation Initiative Implementation Committee started a discussion on how to operationalize the Turin Agenda.

C. The SDG Synthesis Coalition

56. The Independent Evaluation Office has spearheaded the efforts of the international community to produce evaluation syntheses that will inform the review of the Sustainable Development Goals, bolster action for the final five years and inform the post-2030 goal-setting process. The syntheses will present evidence and extract lessons on what works to advance the achievement of the Goals, provide policy recommendations and identify evidence gaps.

57. In 2022, the SDG Synthesis Coalition engaged with more than 35 United Nations entities, numerous multilateral organizations and an increasing number of Member States, as well as a wide network of agencies including the International Development Evaluation Association, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Network on Development Evaluations and members of the Evaluation Cooperation Group. The first synthesis study, focusing on the partnership pillar (Goal 17), started in December 2022.

58. The coalition builds on an expanding array of joint synthesis efforts among United Nations agencies. In 2022, the Independent Evaluation Office participated in a joint exercise with counterparts from the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (as coordinator), that synthesized evaluation evidence on Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) to support learning and decision-making for future programming. The synthesis is expected to be concluded in the second half of 2023.

D. The United Nations Evaluation Group and other partnerships

59. In 2022, the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office was elected Chair of UNEG for 2022-2024. His chairmanship has been driven by an intent to ensure the continuing relevance of evaluation within the United Nations system and to contribute to mitigating the compounding crises of these times by making better use of technology. Staff of the Independent Evaluation Office contributed significantly to the UNEG programme of work, including on the development of guidance on integrating disability inclusion in evaluation; the self-assessment maturity matrix and maturity checklist for United Nations evaluation functions; and the [report](#) on United Nations contributions to national evaluation capacity development and the evolution of national evaluation systems.

60. The UNDP Independent Evaluation Office partnered with the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Service in producing a *Reflections* paper on boosting women's political participation. Acknowledging entrenched social norms as one of the biggest barriers to women's political participation, the paper highlighted the need for continuous exposure to women leaders in politics and documented the effectiveness of quotas for women's political participation, provided that adequate monitoring and mechanisms for non-compliance reporting are established.

61. The Independent Evaluation Office continues to be a leading member of the COVID-19 Evaluation Coalition, a collaborative network of central/independent evaluation units of Governments, United Nations organizations, multilateral institutions and non-governmental organizations. A representative of the office participates in the steering group for the coalition and the strategic joint evaluation of the collective international development and humanitarian assistance response to COVID-19, due to be finalized in 2023.

VII. Knowledge management and innovation

62. In line with its strategy for 2022-2025, the Independent Evaluation Office adopted several initiatives to bolster its knowledge and data management workstream. An upgraded and integrated data architecture allows the office to conduct more efficient analyses, based on both internal and external sources of information that are quality controlled and automatically updated. After the successful launch of the Artificial Intelligence Development Analytics (AIDA) platform, in 2022 the office – in partnership with the United Nations International Computing Centre and Amazon Web Services – started the second phase of the initiative focused on the development of AIDA analytical capabilities, with evaluation evidence and sentiment analysis to generate insights.

63. The Independent Evaluation Office completed the redefinition of the UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre as a one-stop-shop for UNDP evaluation knowledge and tools, including plans, reports and a new methodology centre which includes guidelines, methods and templates. The new website is expected not only to significantly enhance the ease of search for information and guidance, but also to support the improved quality of decentralized evaluations.

64. To respond to increasing demand for methodological innovation, the Independent Evaluation Office has continued exploring how to better leverage emerging practices, including the use of geographic information systems (GIS) in independent country programme evaluations. In Cambodia, GIS analysis provided additional evidence to assess the relevance and coherence of the UNDP country programme, by plotting and mapping project attributes (i.e., the quantity, outcomes and expenditure of projects) against demographic and socioeconomic data by location. A GIS integration tool for independent country programme evaluations was created, including six steps from feasibility analysis to visualization and maps.

65. In the formative evaluation of the integration by UNDP of the principles of leaving no one behind, the Independent Evaluation Office piloted the use of process tracing methodology to track rival explanations along the results chain and assess the strength of evidence for/against each theory. Process tracing helped confirm the claim that “UNDP helps improve livelihoods for the most deprived by supporting countries in determining who is left behind” in five focus countries.

VIII. Staffing and finances, 2022

A. Independent Evaluation Office staffing

66. The structural arrangements of the Independent Evaluation Office continued to operate successfully, with gender parity in place and staff of different backgrounds working across sections to make sure that evaluations drew on diverse insights. In 2022, the office maintained a structure of 35 staff positions, including 27 International Professionals and eight General Service staff. The office also benefited from nine long-term consultants with International Professional service contracts.

B. Independent Evaluation Office budget

67. The Independent Evaluation Office budget for 2022 was set at \$13.01 million, of which the office spent \$11.83 million (91 per cent) on evaluations and other institutional activities.

68. Since 2017, overall evaluation resources have increased from 0.48 per cent to 0.77 per cent of UNDP (regular and other resources) programme utilization.¹² Despite the improvement, there remains a significant gap to reach the 1 per cent prescribed in the revised UNDP evaluation policy, 2019 (see table 2).¹³

Table 2
UNDP evaluation resources, 2017-2022
(In millions of United States dollars)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Independent Evaluation Office expenditures	9.0	8.7	10.9	11.2	11.4	11.8
Decentralized evaluations	12.7	13.3	14.8	14.5	16.4	25.1
Total resources UNDP evaluation function	21.8	22.0	25.7	25.7	27.8	36.9
% share of UNDP programme resources to evaluation	0.48	0.48	0.58	0.57	0.58	0.77

Source: UNDP self-reported decentralized evaluation expenditure data and Independent Evaluation Office expenditure data.

69. In keeping with the UNDP evaluation policy stipulations and the approved integrated budget of the Strategic Plan,¹⁴ the Independent Evaluation Office developed its 2023 work programme to utilize funding for \$14.42 million, with anticipated step increases thereafter, to reach the \$16 million target in fiscal year 2024.

C. Implementation of the multi-year workplan, 2023

70. In 2023, the Independent Evaluation Office will prepare three corporate/thematic evaluations for presentation to the UNDP Executive Board in 2024, one at the first regular session and two at the annual session, plus the 2023 annual report on evaluation (see table 3). In addition to the evaluations of UNDP support to digitalization of public services and UNDP support to ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation (already included in the multi-year workplan 2022-2025), the office will conduct an evaluation of UNDP engagement with the private sector for structural transformation and sustainable livelihoods.¹⁵

¹² Based on expenditure figures provided by UNDP, March 2023.

¹³ DP/2019/29.

¹⁴ DP/2021/29, para. 38 (d).

¹⁵ This will replace the planned evaluation of UNDP strategic innovation, in recognition of the expanding importance of private sector participation to address pressing development needs.

71. The Independent Evaluation Office will complete two regional evaluation syntheses of UNDP work (in the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific) and four *Reflections* papers. The office will also greatly expand its engagement with the SDG Synthesis Coalition, leading the secretariat and facilitating the planning and finalization of five reports by 2025. The independent and external review of the UNDP evaluation function foreseen by the revised UNDP evaluation policy¹⁶ will be commissioned in 2024 in accordance with the multi-year programme of work approved by the Executive Board in 2022.¹⁷

Table 3
Independent Evaluation Office work to be presented to the Executive Board in 2023/2024

<i>Session</i>	<i>Independent Evaluation Office report</i>
Annual session 2023	Annual report on evaluation (for information) Social protection (for decision) Access to justice (for decision)
First regular session 2024	Digitalization of public services (for decision)
Annual session 2024	Annual report on evaluation (for information) Support to ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation (for decision) Engagement with the private sector for structural transformation and sustainable livelihoods (for decision)

72. 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 approval of CPDs. Table 4 shows the evaluations to be conducted in 2023.

Table 4
Independent country programme evaluations, 2023

<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>
Africa	Congo (Republic of) Democratic Republic of the Congo Liberia Madagascar Mali Rwanda
Arab States	Djibouti Iraq Syrian Arab Republic Yemen
Latin America and the Caribbean	Colombia Cuba Paraguay

¹⁶ DP/2019/29, paragraph 60.

¹⁷ DP/2022/6, paragraph 13.