

# UNDP Innovation Facility

## Highlights of the Evaluation Report

**Dr Patrick Breard**  
International Consultant

**30 July 2018**

# Contents

- Context
- Evaluation Questions
- Methodology
- Findings
  - Relevance
  - Effectiveness
  - Efficiency
  - Impact
  - Sustainability
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

# Context

- Innovation Facility Project started in June 2014, with completion date moved from December 2017 to June 2018
- Project Objectives were to support UNDP and partners in finding more effective solutions to development challenges by experimenting with different innovation methods, rapidly learning what works, and catalysing the right partnerships to bring what works to scale.
- Five main areas of work (project outputs):
  - Leading Edge Thinking on Innovation for Development: scanning and scaling innovative service lines
  - Country Support for Co-Design of Development Problems and Solutions: seed-funding
  - Increased visibility, familiarity and understanding of UNDP's approach to innovation for development: Advocacy, Outreach and Communication
  - Increased availability of qualified Social Innovators to support UNDP innovation for development
  - Improved organizational process (for Performance Efficiency)
- Project Governance included Project Board, Project Team, and project support
- Funding support from the Government of Denmark and from UNDP BPPS with staff salaries for the team

# Evaluation Questions

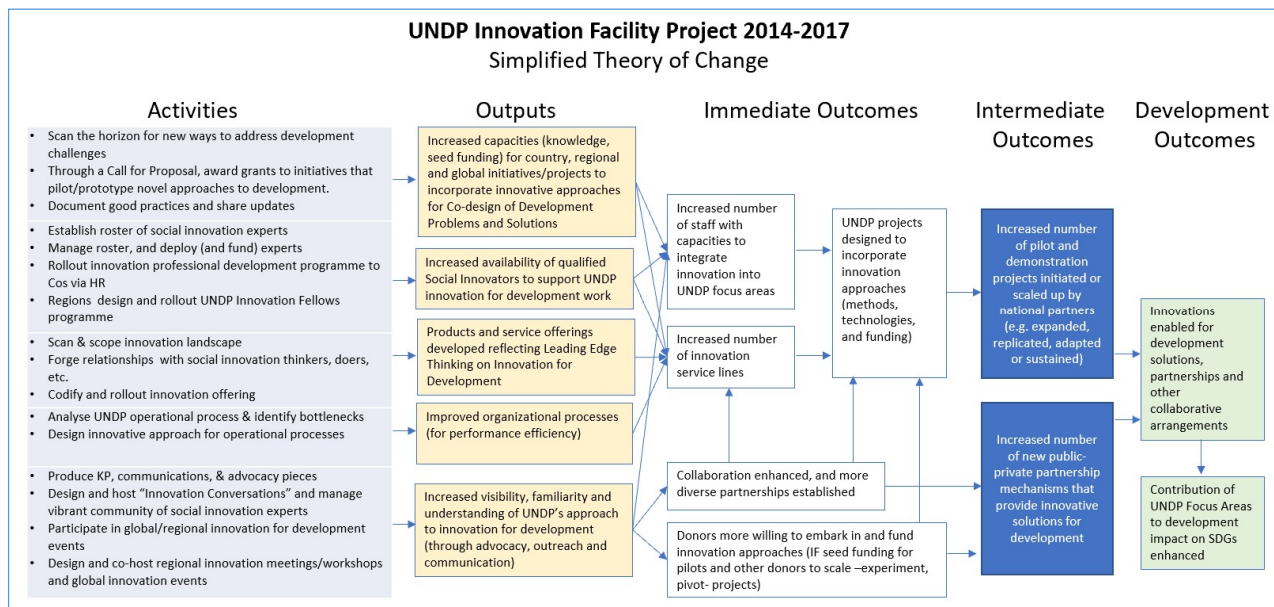
- Main evaluation questions
  - How has the Innovation Facility project supported UNDP in achieving its strategic results?
  - What were the outstanding features of how the Innovation Facility project operates?
  - What are shortcomings / flaws in the setup?
  - What should the next iteration of an Innovation Facility project do differently, how should it operate to be more effective?
- Sub-questions
  - 1 | Relevance: *How well designed is the project to meet its broader objective to advance innovation across UNDP?*
  - 2 | Effectiveness: *How well has the project delivered the expected results?*
  - 3 | Efficiency: *To what extent is the project on track to catalyze innovation at UNDP?*
  - 4 | Impact: *To what extent is the project on track to influence the broader corporate system in the uptake of innovation in contexts where it has invested in innovation?*
  - 5 | Sustainability: *To what extent has the project shown to be sustainable and/or scalable*

# Methodology

- Assessment conducted between February and July 2018
- Data collection
  - Desk review of +200 information resources including project outputs, progress reports, and past evaluations
  - Interviews with 19 key informants within Project Board, Project Team, CO Project Managers, and external partners
  - Survey questionnaire responded by 42 Project Managers (62% response rate) that received seed-funding support from the Innovation Facility and representing 31 COs
  - Network review of Twitter account @UNDP\_innovation and Yammer group activity
  - Four case studies (Innovation for Development Lab (I4D) at UNDP Egypt, the ServiceLab project at UNDP Georgia, the Baidu E-waste Recycling project by UNDP China, and the Spatial Data Sandbox, a cross-regional (global) UNDP project on big data, new and emerging data )
- Data analysis qualitative and quantitative, including cross-tabulations
- Limitations: no country visit and no consultation with national partners

# Findings

- Reconstructed Theory of Change at evaluation confirmed outputs but pointed out adjustments (pivots) made to activities during project implementation



# Relevance

- Project was found highly relevant
  - External environment becoming increasingly complex, rapidly changing, and interconnected, while SDGs call for new approaches and partnerships to solving development challenges
  - Internally, forces at play that require UNDP to become more agile and innovative
- UNDP Strategic Plan 2013-2017 made room to innovation, but new Strategic Plan creates a much stronger platform for the project including through the new IRRF
- The five main outputs of the project are mutually reinforcing and form a coherent framework towards achieving the set objectives
- Increased efforts during project implementation to clarify the support provided to each the SDG
- The relevance of the project could be further evidenced with a clearer causal chain linking project outputs/outcomes with UNDP Signature solutions and expected development outputs/outcomes

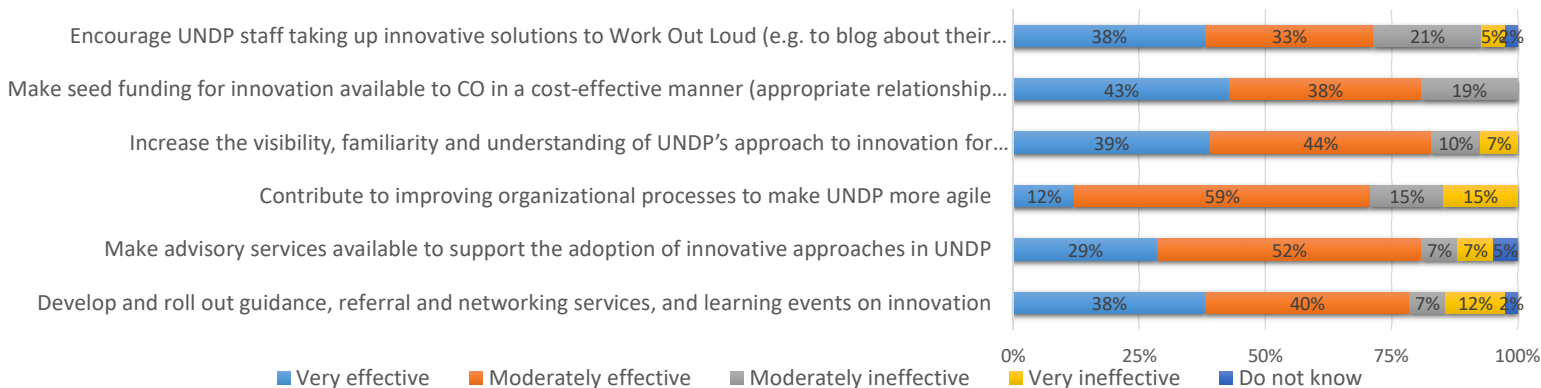
# Effectiveness (1/2)

- Overall assessment indicates that the main objectives of the Innovation Facility project were achieved
  - Portfolio of innovative approaches has grown over the course of the project with 18 innovative approaches identified and tested across UNDP in 2017 (Project Output 1)
  - The Innovation Facility has supported 142 projects with seed funding and technical assistance between 2014 and 2017 (Output 2)
  - Ample evidence of achieving Output 3 “Increased visibility, familiarity and understanding of UNDP’s approach to innovation for development (through Advocacy, Outreach and Communication)”, with knowledge products (e.g. Hackers toolkit) and reports on innovative service lines, 70 blog posts in 2015 and more than 80 in 2016, Innovation Newsletters to over 1500 innovation champions, monthly Innovation Calls with the Administrator, Twitter account with 14701 followers
  - Global roster populated with 57 vetted social innovators (Output 4) and expertise brokering from the Regional Innovation Leads
  - Two key initiatives to improve UNDP organizational processes: Open Innovation Challenges Policy, and Revision of the Programme and Project Management (PPM) to promote more flexible approach to projects and facilitate innovation



# Effectiveness (2/2)

- The initial objectives of the project were ambitious enough to advance change in the organization but not necessarily to trigger radical change
  - Limited contribution to making UNDP more agile
  - Focus on the innovators and early adopters with more limited change for the early and late majorities
  - UNDP CO Directors, operations, as well as national partners important for innovation to be taken up



**In your opinion, how effective has been the Innovation Facility in achieving the following outputs?**

Source: Evaluation survey, 2018

# Efficiency

- The project has achieved the expected objectives in a cost-efficient manner
  - Other UN organizations may allocate more capacities to innovation (management and staff)
  - More than 600 staff trained on innovation with minimal resources from Innovation Facility but strategically used
  - Efficient mutual support through CO innovation champions called as internal consultants to train other COs and their national partners
  - Analysis of the ROAR shows that for every dollar of catalytic investment made in 2017 by the Innovation Facility, an additional 67% of local resources has been raised by the project
- Annual seed-funding that leaves 6-month to implementation not aligned with COs constraints
- Project Cost-sharing modality not necessarily the best vehicle to manage seed funding (e.g. project staff time on financial and administrative management instead of technical assistance or resource mobilization), therefore thematic trust fund would be an option worth exploring
- Coordination with other innovation-relevant initiatives (Project Catalyst, Country Investment Facility) mostly lacking
- Collaboration with Executive Office and innovation as part of UNDP Strategic Plan in the making

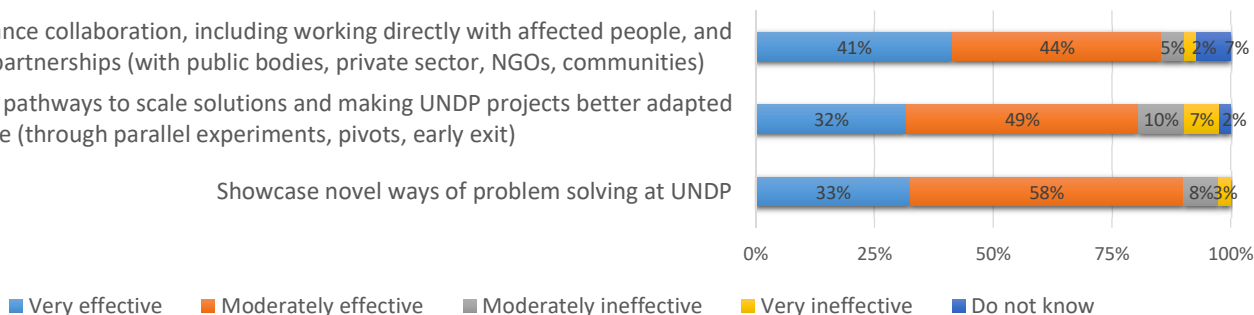
# Impact 1/3

- Between 2014 and 2017, 142 Innovation Facility initiatives were initiated and 21 scaled-up
- Seed-funding was referred by informants as the most critical component of the project
- Around 93% of evaluation survey respondents find that the project has been effective to “Showcase novel ways of problem solving at UNDP” and 85% to “Support projects that enhance collaboration, including working directly with affected people, and establish more diverse partnerships”

Support projects that enhance collaboration, including working directly with affected people, and establish more diverse partnerships (with public bodies, private sector, NGOs, communities)

Encourage thinking on new pathways to scale solutions and making UNDP projects better adapted to scale (through parallel experiments, pivots, early exit)

Showcase novel ways of problem solving at UNDP

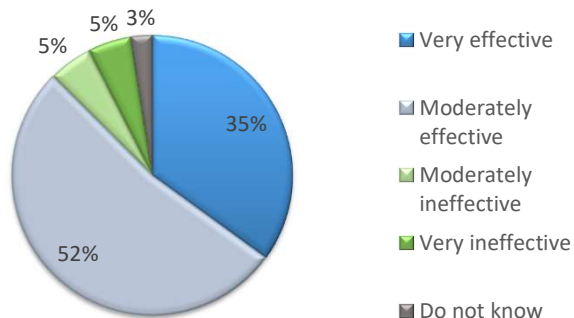


**In your opinion, how effective has been the Innovation Facility in achieving the following outcomes?**

Source: Evaluation survey, 2018.

# Impact 2/3

- The project has contributed to make funded projects more effective (improved quality, targeting, inclusiveness, timeliness)
- In 2017, 46% of the 35 projects seed-funded by the Innovation Facility involved a partnership with the Civil Society, 40% with the Private Sector, and 34% with Academic and Research Institutions
- With support from the Innovation Facility project and other sources (e.g. regional or national initiatives), 533 innovative approaches were under implementation in 2017 across 327 projects in 135 COs



**Perceived effectiveness of the Innovation Facility in contributing to make funded projects more effective (improved quality, targeting, inclusiveness, timeliness)?**

Source: Evaluation Survey, 2018.



**Perceived top advantage brought by the initiatives seed-funded by the Innovation Facility in 2017.**

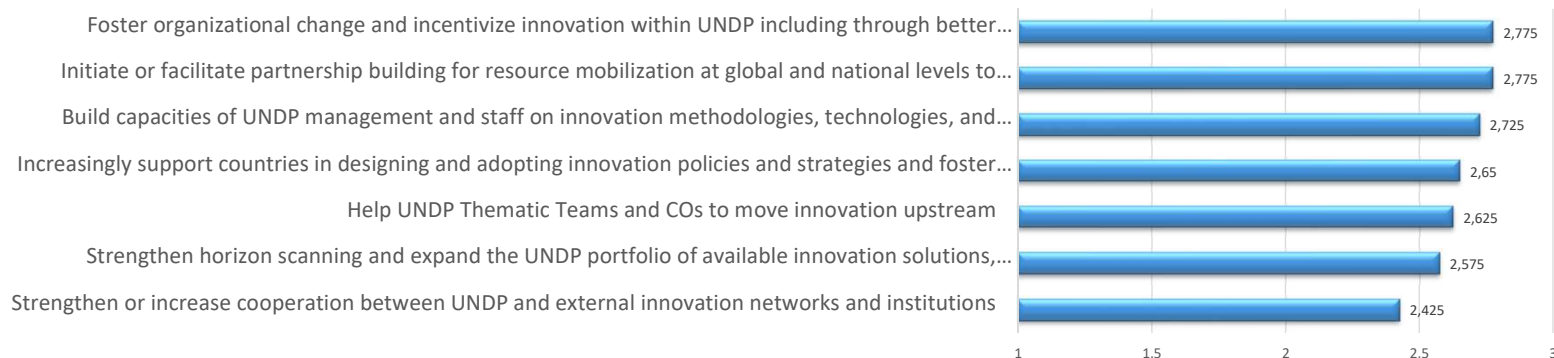
Source: Innovation Facility Survey, 2018.

# Impact 3/3

- When considering the 35 projects seed-funded in 2017, 34% received support to design and test an innovative approach and 60% to bolster early stage implementation, while fewer initiatives (6%) were funded to scale-up, despite this stage being referred as a priority in the call for proposals
- *“A big part of scaling comes from handholding. What happens is that when a new initiative is tried out, it is very important to provide consistent support to the national partners who are also facing the same problem of overcoming resistance from the way of doing business as usual. So, you need to handhold the process, to be with them all the way through until they are strong enough to prove their case to their own managers, to their own decision-makers. I think the greatest strength for us has been that UNDP managed to stay with the national partners for quite some time, like 3 years for example in my case with the first lab...”*
- By design, the project has contributed to establish/federate a supportive culture targeting the innovators and early adopters but less prominently the risk-adverse and late majority.
- The causal link between the project and development outcomes can be better evidenced after the new Strategic Plan and IRRF, providing the project with increased opportunities to influence the broader corporate system

# Sustainability

- The sustainability of the Innovation Facility project after 2019 is unclear due to the concentration of resources on one partner
- The Innovation Facility was able to catalyze sustainable continued long-term benefits
  - Previous findings indicate that 60% of Innovation Facility initiatives funded in 2014 and 2015 were taken up in 2016 in partnership with the government, private sector and civil society
  - Additional innovative approaches were taken up by 14% of CO project teams after initial seed-funding



**Perceived level of priority of the proposed objectives to improve the effectiveness and impact of the Innovation Facility in the future.**

Source: Evaluation Survey, 2018.

# Conclusions (1/3)

- The project has supported UNDP in achieving its strategic results by fostering internal change and enabling COs to bring new solutions to national partners in response to their development objectives
- The project has successfully participated in the identification and promotion of innovative approaches. New service lines have been adopted and scaled up, particularly in Asia & Pacific and ECIS.
- The seed-funding modality also has been particularly effective at raising the attention of COs on the innovation agenda, familiarizing staff with the new service lines, and helping partners to take on and test new development solutions
- The project has contributed to make funded projects more effective (improved quality, targeting, inclusiveness, timeliness)
- The project has contributed to mobilizing additional resources and partnerships in response to development needs

# Conclusions (2/3)

- The project has been missing a Theory of Change and monitoring instruments that would better track impact or be more effective at communicating failures and lessons learned, and therefore at fostering organizational learning
- The current “projectization” of the Innovation Facility including through the support that it provides at country level appears to mitigate the capacity to scale initiatives
- The current funding structure of the Innovation Facility by concentrating financial support on the Government of Denmark creates a risk for the sustainability of the project
- The lack of rewards or incentives prevents staff (e.g. policy advisors, project managers, etc.) from more actively scanning the horizon, reporting innovative approaches, and changing the status quo
- The project confronts a lack of clear process/procedure/governance in UNDP to institutionalize service lines, i.e. to transition a new approach from innovation to the mainstream, including to a “global owner” and capacities, being in BPPS, a Regional Hub, or Centre of Excellence



# Conclusions (3/3)

- The short timeframe (6 months or less) given to CO to use seed-funds has been a constraint as well as the lack of visibility on subsequent seed-funds to scale-up initiatives
- Seed-funding and technical assistance provided by the Innovation Facility tend to concentrate on projects, while innovation implies a broader change management agenda with additional emulating levers at CO level and up to national partner institutions. In other words, many CO still need more empowerment towards risk-taking and sustainable innovation.
- Advocacy, communication, skills-building initiatives (especially learning by doing) and training have moderately targeted CO Directors and operations staff, who are critical in making innovation tested and embedded in planning and processes
- Networking has successfully embarked the like-minded, such as social innovators, but less vividly the more risk adverse bilateral donors and national communities
- The lack of a more comprehensive functional and organizational review that would have pointed out all the “choke points” hampering or slowing-down innovation throughout the organization has limited the contribution of the project to making UNDP more agile

# Recommendations

Overall, the evaluation found that the Innovation Facility project has shown significant achievements in 3.5 years of implementation. The following recommendations were formulated to inform future project development:

- 1. The Innovation Facility project should develop a Theory of Change that accounts for the new vision and priorities set forth in UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021.**
- 2. The Innovation Facility should consider having joint Board for all global initiatives with a strong innovation component, including Project Catalyst, the Innovation Facility and others**
- 3. The project should conduct a review of the administrative and procedural bottlenecks that impede innovation within UNDP**
- 4. The project should continue looking for the leading edge and explore mechanisms to institutionalize service lines that were taken-up by the organization**
- 5. The project should explore ways to further empower COs to take-up and scale innovation**
- 6. The project should consider installing a trust fund to “de-projectize” the Innovation Facility and facilitate the mobilization of additional resources**
- 7. The Innovation Facility should further emphasize and support cultural change as a key enabler of innovation adoption within UNDP and across partner organizations**