



INDEPENDENT
Evaluation Office

United Nations Development Programme

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION

OF UNDP STRATEGIC PLAN
2018–2021



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FOREWORD



It is my pleasure to present the evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Strategic Plan 2018–2021. The Strategic Plan is based on a vision to achieve sustainable development by eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions; accelerating structural transformations for sustainable development; and building resilience to crises and shocks.



This evaluation provides an assessment of UNDP's vision set out in the Strategic Plan, and the extent to which the enablers and changes introduced to operationalize it are helping to improve UNDP's support for fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals and helping the organization to adapt and respond to changes in context.

This is the first UNDP Strategic Plan following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The Strategic Plan was written at an especially challenging time for UNDP given the ongoing reforms to the United Nations system. The evaluation comes at a time when UNDP is also having to significantly adapt its efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the challenging context, UNDP has made relevant contributions to development results within three broad development settings; was swift to adapt its capabilities to support UN development system reform and signature solutions stipulated in the Strategic Plan; and sustained a stable influx of resources with agile mobilization and repurposing of funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP has made concerted efforts to promote collaborative partnerships to support and finance the Goals; to more systemically integrate approaches for more balanced consideration of economic, social and environmental dimensions; and to mainstream the 'leave no one behind' principle. UNDP has made good progress improving its management and operations and showing determination to be a more client-oriented operational services provider with commitment to improving people management, learning and development; streamlining processes and procedures; and expanding investments in digital and technological innovation.

There is a wealth of ideas surfacing, with great potential to transform UNDP's work. The elevation of innovation in the Strategic Plan has been followed by important investments in growing existing capabilities and mainstreaming innovation efforts across the organization. Digital initiatives are increasingly taking shape. They gained speed in support of the COVID-19 response and are helping to develop UNDP capabilities to meet growing demands in the digital development agenda. Global and country support platforms are helping to expand the expertise available at UNDP regional hubs and country offices, gradually enabling

the organization to better manage and deploy its assets and capabilities to manage more context-specific and iterative and experimental approaches to problem-solving for sustainable development.

Notwithstanding such progress and successes, further efforts are needed to better define UNDP's role and value proposition in support of the 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 pandemic response, with attention to the organization's altered position at the country level following United Nations development system reform. To meet the increasing demands driven by the change in context brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP's work on innovation should prioritize digital transformation, address administrative bottlenecks that hinder innovation, ensure improvements to knowledge management systems and develop a more deliberate approach to tracking and scaling successful innovations that can accelerate results on the Goals. To fully deliver on the Strategic Plan promise to evolve and innovate its business model, UNDP should expand its adaptive management capabilities and develop additional funding models that increase agility and flexibility. UNDP should continue to seek flatter decision-making structures and empowered teams able to better mainstream integrated solutions and operate more efficiently in the midst of an increasingly dynamic and uncertain development landscape.

Results-based management and learning from successes and failures remain key areas for improvement. There is considerable scope for a more comprehensive and strategic approach to the establishment of global and country support platforms, to move UNDP from a project-based organization towards more portfolio and systems-based approaches. In recognition that UNDP's main asset is its workforce, the organization should timely deliver on its 'People for 2030' strategy to improve staff capabilities for systems thinking and transformation; to reward high performance that is results focused; and to enable an innovative culture within the organization.

As UNDP develops a new Strategic Plan, I hope this evaluation will inform how the organization can further enhance its contribution to more equitable and sustainable development.



Oscar A. Garcia
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BACKGROUND

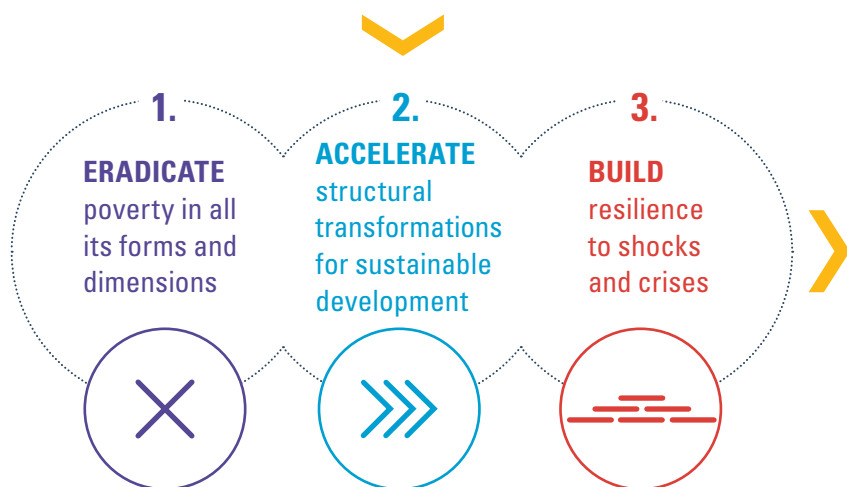
For the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Strategic Plan lies at the heart of the management system. Most importantly, the Plan guides the organization and provides a framework for accountability to its partners.

The global development context in which the UNDP drafted and is implementing its Strategic Plan 2018-2021 includes three pivotal events steering the course of international development support. These are the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the reforms of the United Nations system, with its work on development, management and peace and security all in flux. Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first are indicated as principles to permeate all key areas of UNDP collaboration.

These solutions are meant to be flexible to meet the unique challenges and demands faced in the 170 countries where UNDP operates and commits to contribute to 27 development outputs. Between 2018 and 2020, UNDP spent \$16.09 billion, with \$13.53 billion on programming, with 75 per cent linked to the signature solutions for poverty and governance, and less than 3 per cent each was spent on the signature solutions for energy and gender.

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP carried out an evaluation of UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The evaluation was carried out to (i) support greater UNDP accountability to global and national stakeholders and development partners; and (ii) contribute to learning and programme strategizing for the next strategic plan.

The vision of the Strategic Plan, is to help countries to achieve sustainable development by eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development and build resilience to crises and shocks, framed in the form of **three development settings communicated as outcomes:**



Within these development settings, **6 signature solutions** are identified to:

1. Keep people out of poverty
2. Strengthen effective, inclusive and accountable governance
3. Enhance national prevention and recovery capacities for resilient societies
4. Promote nature-based solutions for a sustainable planet
5. Close the energy gap
6. Strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

WHAT WE EVALUATED

Towards the end of every UNDP strategic planning period, the IEO evaluates what the organization intended to do, what has transpired and where there may be room for improvement. At this juncture, the evaluation looks back on an organization whose way of working across 170 countries has shifted over the past three years in response to changes to the United Nations development system.

This evaluation covers the first UNDP Strategic Plan following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The Strategic Plan had been developed and is being carried out in the midst of the UN Secretary General's reform for the repositioning of the UN development system¹, which included the delinking of the resident coordinator function from

UNDP. These events are of pivotal importance for UNDP's mandates and positioning in a changing global development landscape. The evaluation comes at a time when UNDP had to significantly adapt its efforts due to the COVID-19 crisis and covers the UNDP response to the COVID-19 pandemic (March to December 2020) to address the organization's readiness to respond to the unprecedented requests for support.

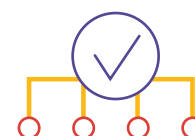
The evaluation assesses the vision set out in the Strategic Plan and the extent to which the enablers and changes introduced to operationalize it are helping to improve UNDP's support for the fulfilment of the SDGs at global and national levels, and also helping the organization to adapt and respond to changes in context.

The objectives of the evaluation were to assess whether the current Strategic Plan:

- Offers a **coherent vision, purpose and sense of mission** for the organization.



- Is **recognized across the organization as a guide for action** to help countries meet their development needs, especially pertaining to the SDGs, and taking into account stakeholder expectations for services from UNDP.



- Contributes to **improved development results within the three broad development settings** identified in the Strategic Plan.



¹ General Assembly resolution on repositioning of the UN development system, adopted in May 2018 in the context of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (A/res/72/279).

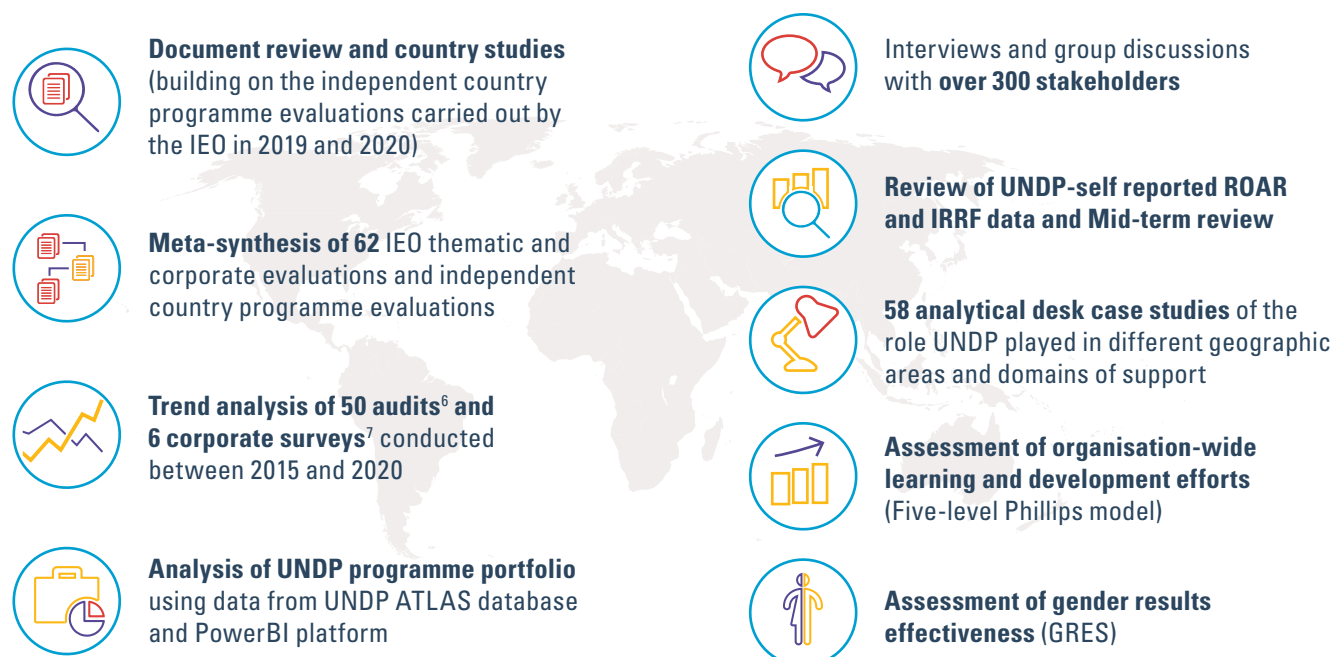
METHODS USED

The evaluation followed a theory-driven systems approach² drawing on the theory of change, developed by the evaluation team, considering the Strategic Plan's theory of change but focusing on the assumptions identified by the evaluation and in

alignment with the evaluation questions.³ The evaluation assessed the extent to which the interdependent institutional enablers effectively integrate through a web of relationships to deliver on the vision of the Strategic Plan.⁴

Data collection methods and sources

Mixed methods of data collection were used with appropriate analytical approaches. These incorporated qualitative and quantitative techniques and content analysis, both manual and with limited machine learning.⁵



² Theory-based evaluations are usually based on a theory of change that seeks to explain changes, considering underlying assumptions and risks.

³ The theory of change developed considers the Strategic Plan theory of change. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/executive-board/documents-for-sessions/adv2018-annual.html>

⁴ What are shown as 'outputs' and 'outcomes' in the Strategic Plan theory of change are in fact actions, a deficiency in the design of the Strategic Plan, but for the evaluation the words are adjusted and considered as outputs and outcomes in the strategic plan evaluation theory of change.

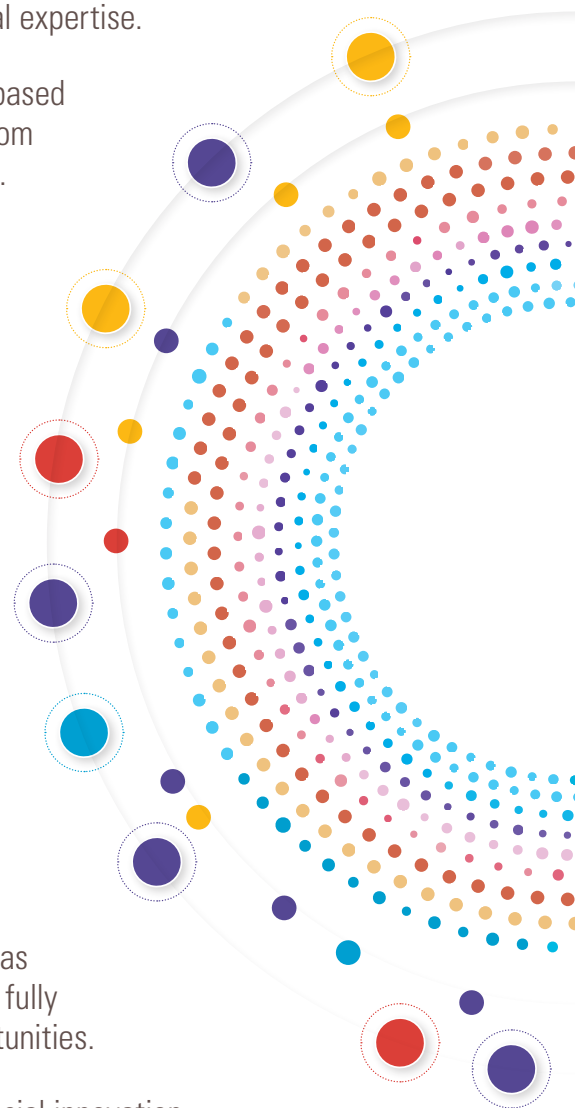
⁵ The analysis and synthesis of data made use of some limited machine learning to build on the collated results from the results oriented analysis reports conducted by BPPS.

⁶ Internal audits from the Office of Audit and Investigations.

⁷ These included the 2015, 2017 and 2020 partnership surveys; 2016 and 2018 general staff surveys; and 2020 UN development system survey.

WHAT WE FOUND

1. The Strategic Plan is a flexible instrument that sets UNDP in the right direction, but some concepts need more clarity and time to evolve and take shape.
2. UNDP has swiftly adapted to UN development system reform, yet challenges remain in repositioning, particularly in the humanitarian-peace-development nexus.
3. Stakeholders had favourable views of UNDP's relevance in gender, governance and environment, but less so in poverty and energy, and appreciated its programme implementation and technical expertise.
4. Despite continued improvements, results-based management, monitoring and reporting, and learning from successes and failures remain key areas for improvement.
5. UNDP has contributed to all the SDGs, but it is unclear whether and to what extent its tools effectively helped to accelerate progress towards each Goal.
6. The Strategic Plan promoted gender equality and women's empowerment as a key accelerator of development results, but the lack of human and financial resources hampers more transformative results.
7. UNDP has made efforts to operationalize the principles of the 2030 Agenda. The organization is well positioned to increase its focus on thought leadership and contributions to inclusiveness and sustainability.
8. Important steps have been taken to set up an enabling environment for innovation, but UNDP has yet to sufficiently adapt rules and procedures to fully leverage partnerships and financing opportunities.
9. Accelerator labs are generating exposure for social innovation techniques and digital technologies and setting the basis for integrated approaches to understanding development challenges and implementing solutions.



10. A wealth of innovations are surfacing in UNDP, but internal challenges – such as limited risk appetite, financial resources, flexibility in the rules and regulations, and knowledge management – limit scale-up.

11. The UNDP digital strategy has emerged as an important and timely enabler of the Strategic Plan, contributing to innovation, the response to COVID-19 and growing demands in the digital development agenda.

12. The Global Policy Network offers good potential for increased efficiencies in deploying expertise. Still needed is a more coherent approach to capacity mapping, mobility and flexible contracting modalities.

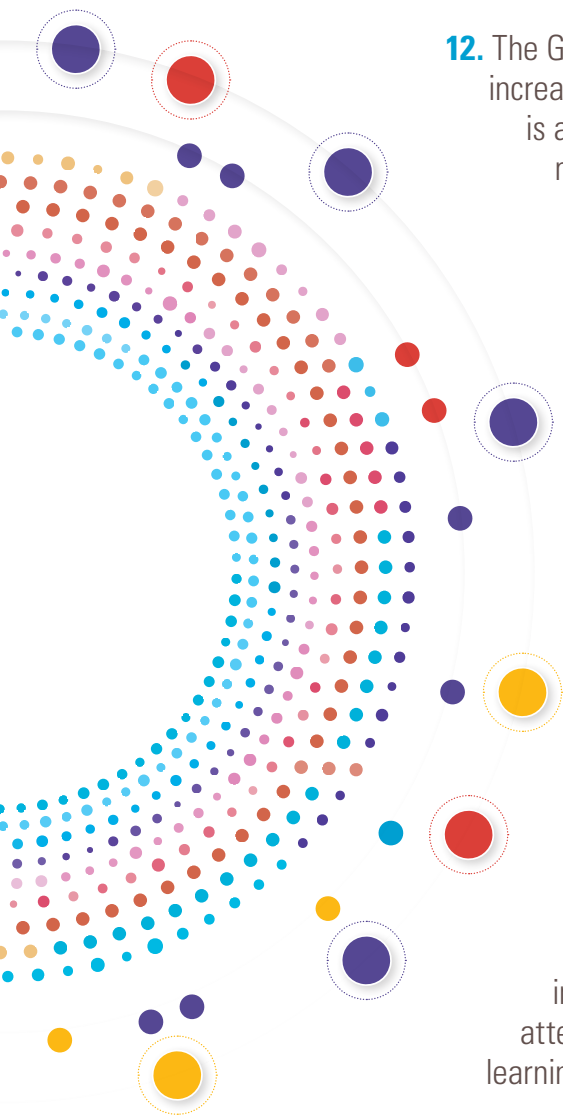
13. Country support platforms are valued for their potential to spur innovation and integration. Insufficient attention has been paid to measurement and ensuring their performance, results, effectiveness and sustainability.

14. UNDP reduced management costs, balanced the budget, streamlined processes and procedures, improved client orientation and reduced its carbon footprint, advancing its agility, flexibility and client satisfaction.

15. UNDP has launched comprehensive people management and learning and development strategies, but the organization has yet to make the tools for these strategies fully functional, risk savvy and measurable.

16. The nimbleness and innovation of UNDP are impeded by a risk-averse culture and inconsistent attention to poor performance and behaviour, hindering learning and opportunities to improve results.

17. Agility in resource mobilization and flexibility in repurposing funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed UNDP to sustain and increase the influx of resources even during these challenging financial times.



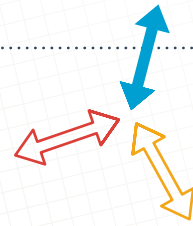
SNAPSHOT

OF OUR CONCLUSIONS

- 1** Implementing the **TRANSFORMATIVE VISION** of the UNDP strategic plan requires more time, capabilities, flexible management and financial models.



- 2** The reform of the UN development system compels **UNDP TO REPOSITION** itself, with a clearly articulated value-added proposition, based on its comparative strengths.

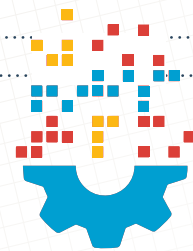


- 3** The strengths and positioning of UNDP in integration of the SDGs have gradually become more evident but its role in **ACCELERATING PROGRESS** is unclear due to inadequate reporting.

- 4** Further integration of gender equality and women's empowerment as an **SDG ACCELERATOR** has been limited due to insufficient resources and attention to sustainable transformative change.



- 5** Effective **INNOVATION and DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION** at UNDP will depend on improvements to knowledge systems, resources and scaling-up strategies.



6



Global and country **SUPPORT PLATFORMS** are expanding the expertise available in UNDP field offices to manage more context-specific approaches for sustainable development.

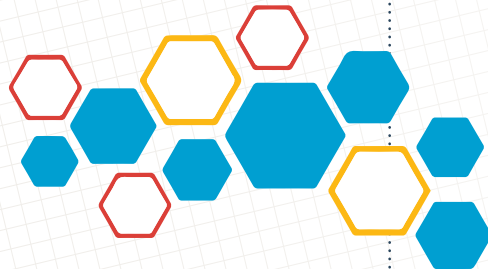
7



Despite improvements, UNDP systems for monitoring and reporting are still not fit for results-based management and have yet to make full use of **LESSONS LEARNED** to improve results.

8

UNDP has improved its **MANAGEMENT, OPERATIONS** and **CLIENT ORIENTATION**, though shortcomings remain and need to be addressed to respond to fast-evolving development challenges.



9

Unless UNDP finds more **PREDICTABLE** and **FLEXIBLE WAYS TO FUND** integrated country programming, it will be difficult to resource the systemic transformation needed for the integrated approaches.



10

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges and opportunities, but space remains for UNDP to further leverage its thought leadership to **BUILD FORWARD BETTER.**



Recommendation

1

The UNDP role and value proposition. In the next strategic plan, UNDP should better define its role and value proposition in support of the 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 pandemic response, with attention to the organization's altered position at the country level following the reform of the United Nations development system; and should anchor its work on its most recognized comparative strengths, with particular focus on principles of inclusiveness and sustainability to build forward better with attention to leaving no one behind.

While actively collaborating with other United Nations agencies in support of all the Sustainable Development Goals where logical and efficient, the organization should strive to be a development innovator, making better use of new mechanisms to promote integrated development solutions with a focus on the Goals where it has comparative strengths. Such focus does not mean that UNDP will not contribute to most, if not all, of the other Goals; given the integrated nature of the Goals, the broad contribution of UNDP is inevitable. Particular attention should be ensured to integrate the sustainability lens and the principle of leaving no one behind as catalysts for achieving the Goals. Furthermore, the focus of the next strategic plan should be on supporting the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, not only to help with recovery but to reset development pathways for a green future, with equality and resilience to build forward better.

UNDP should: (a) pay renewed attention to reducing poverty and inequalities and strengthening social protection; (b) promote the transition to a green economy, leveraging its successful work done on environment and natural resource management; and (c) strengthen inclusive democratic institutions, especially through digital transformation. This should be done in support of more resilient societies with a broader focus on shocks, the climate emergency, conflicts and future of work with foresight and complexity scenario systems thinking. In addition, UNDP should better foster the triple humanitarian-development-peace nexus to address inequalities with a rights-based, evidence-informed and human-centred approach, stressing the importance of ensuring systemic and transformative results that are socioeconomically and environmentally long lasting.

FORWARD



UNDP is not alone in its integration work, as this function should be a shared responsibility with United Nations country teams and other development partners. However, UNDP, with its universal presence and global network, should strategically position itself to be at the forefront of integrated solutions, serving as a catalyst, helping to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and fostering more innovative ways of working, including through ‘whole-of-government, whole-of-society and whole-of United Nations’ approaches. In this process, UNDP will need to better monitor and evaluate its contributions, tools and offers for the Goals, and ensure more adequate stakeholder mapping to effectively work across complex systems, understanding and recognizing the comparative strengths of different players to ‘connect the dots’ across development issues.

Actions should include networked solutions that bring diverse stakeholders and partnerships focusing on specific Goals to codesign and implement resilient systems that can adapt quickly to changes in different areas and absorb shocks, to ensure resilience and sustainability. All that will require the next strategic plan to bring greater clarity of concepts such as integrated approaches, Sustainable Development Goal integration and integrator roles. It will also be necessary to have more specific guidance for delivery mechanisms, alternative financing modalities and adapted flexible business models to help operationalize the systemic transformation envisioned for this decade of action.

UNDP acknowledges **recommendation 1**, which calls upon the organization to better define its role in support of the 2030 Agenda and the COVID-19 pandemic response.

The 2030 Agenda remains at the heart of the strategic plan with the goal of supporting countries to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and pursue their development trajectories. Development challenges have grown in complexity over time, requiring new tools and solutions that address multiple challenges simultaneously. To meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda, including leaving no one behind, and of a repositioned



Management Response



and strengthened United Nations development system, UNDP will continuously refine and enhance its approach for a new era of development, building on its strong foundation of development experience, grounded in practice, performance and relationships of trust.

In the new strategic plan for 2022-2025, UNDP will make deliberate efforts to maximize the development impact of all the signature solutions with the aim of making breakthroughs across the 2030 Agenda. Supporting countries to further their strategies for leaving no one behind is pivotal during the decade of action, including a renewed focus on addressing underlying and root causes of the disadvantages and barriers faced by the most vulnerable and poorest, exacerbated by COVID-19. UNDP will strive to be a reservoir of knowledge, good practices and integrated inclusive and sustainable policies to meet the needs of people and the planet. Under the new plan, UNDP will support the next generation of country programmes and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks with a focus on inclusiveness and sustainability for the COVID-19 recovery.

Recommendation

2

Innovations. To meet the increasing demands driven by the change in context brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP work on innovation should prioritize support to partner countries on digital transformation, address administrative bottlenecks that hinder innovation, ensure improvements to knowledge management systems and develop a more deliberate approach to tracking and scaling successful innovations that can accelerate results towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

To help change the risk-averse organizational culture and ensure that innovation can be accelerated, it is particularly important that UNDP be bold in proactively addressing remaining administrative bottlenecks that limit experimentation, learning and private sector engagement. To optimize return on investments and accelerate results, UNDP should take steps to ensure dynamic alignment between its organizational policies and the evolving innovation agenda to formalize support for scaling-up of demonstrated successful solutions and practices into its mainstream ways of working. In this regard, clear, communicable norms and evidence benchmarks to support measurement and transparent decision-making about scaling-up are required to support the participation of all business units.

Building on its comparative advantages, UNDP should focus its attention on social and digital innovation and help country offices and the national Governments that they support to navigate some of the complex emerging challenges and opportunities associated with private sector engagement,

the use of new technologies and implications of new working methods. Furthermore, it will be important to prioritize the formalization of distinct support models to ensure that digital opportunities are harnessed across UNDP country offices, taking into account the various contexts in which UNDP operates.

UNDP accepts **recommendation 2**. In the strategic plan, 2022-2025, UNDP will expand its support to partner countries in areas of innovation and digital transformation and create opportunities to deliver more responsive and effective services to citizens.

Successfully scaling digital innovations is a key priority for UNDP. Throughout 2020, the Chief Digital Office has been piloting and developing systematic mechanisms to scale digital innovations across the organization, via the “Digital Sprint” initiative and later the “Digital X Scale Accelerator” initiative, which provides some resources and supports key innovations to scale, in close collaboration with the Strategic Innovation Unit and the accelerator labs. In 2021, UNDP will continue this initiative while addressing related administrative bottlenecks such as policies and processes.

Helping country offices and Governments navigate digital transformation has been a key priority for innovation and the digital agenda. At a more strategic level, the Chief Digital Office will work closely with the Strategic Innovation Unit to better serve countries with regard to the digital transformation agenda. Internally, UNDP will strengthen local digital capacities through the launch of the Digital Advocates Network. Designed as an agile learning network, it will allow UNDP to share digital expertise faster and create local delivery capacities. By implementing a “digital by default” approach, UNDP is mainstreaming digital elements and ways of working into all programmes and projects. With the launch of the UNDP data strategy in March 2021, UNDP aims to become a data-driven organization and thus deliver more responsive and effective services.

In June 2020, UNDP launched SparkBlue, an online engagement platform that powers six corporate signature solutions through eight communities of practice, empowering 10,000+ users from all regions to co-create new knowledge and share real-time insights on Sustainable Development Goal solutions. Building on the momentum generated by SparkBlue, a knowledge management framework will be developed to advance implementation of the strategic plan 2022-2025. The UNDP approach to knowledge will leverage the organization’s ability to convene and connect, to be an innovator, advocate, partner and integrator—including with the public, private and financial sectors, the United Nations system and the broader development community.



Management Response



Recommendation

3

In May 2020, the accelerator lab team, together with Columbia University, produced a strategy to scale up innovation in development inter alia by identifying different approaches to scaling up for innovation. The accelerator lab team is committed to implementing the strategy across the existing and new cohorts of accelerator labs. In addition, with the creation of the Strategic Innovation Unit and the pivot in approach for the Innovation Facility, UNDP will continue to explore a transformational approach to innovation through “deep demonstrations”.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment as a Sustainable Development Goal accelerator. UNDP should further articulate how to expand and achieve the concrete benefits of integrating gender equality and women’s empowerment as a catalytic development accelerator for the 2030 Agenda and the Goals. The Gender Equality Seal process should be recommended to all offices, with efforts to increase financial investment in gender across all areas. UNDP should more adequately equip the organization with staff specialized in gender who are able to implement systems that focus on gender-responsive and transformative results.

In the next strategic plan, UNDP needs to further articulate how to achieve the concrete benefits of integrating gender equality and women’s empowerment as a development accelerator. This will also provide a clearer value proposition to donors on the unique value added by UNDP on gender to accelerate progress towards the Goals. With a systemic approach, all UNDP programmes should undergo a Gender Results Effectiveness Scale analysis at the design, implementation and evaluation phases to help UNDP achieve more responsive and transformative gender results.

More systemic approaches for transformation will require UNDP to meet or even exceed its commitment to allocate 15 per cent of programme resources for initiatives that have gender equality and/or the empowerment of women as their primary and explicit objective. In this regard, the accuracy of the gender marker should be strengthened. More guidance is required for country offices to share a common understanding of how to use the marker more strategically. The marker assigned at the design stage should, if needed, be adjusted during the implementation stage. There should be stronger quality assurance processes in place at both the country office and regional levels to ensure proper use of the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale and the gender marker.

Given its proven catalytic potential, UNDP should require that all offices engage in the Gender Equality Seal process and make efforts to scale up the use of the seal not just in the private sector but also in government. This will require increased staff capacity for gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels, with adequate contractual arrangements for gender specialists. At the same time, it will be important to deepen the mainstreaming of the gender perspective across all teams instead of continuing the current overreliance on gender focal points. Further efforts towards gender parity should evolve to focus on improving working conditions for women. For instance, more attention should be given to the dimensions of unpaid care, a need illustrated strongly by the COVID-19 pandemic, while also augmenting UNDP human resources policy by aligning paternity leave for fathers and maternity/paternity leave for same-sex parents with current maternity leave provisions. These policy shifts can help support the transformation of roles within the household, which also impacts gender equality in the workplace.

UNDP accepts **recommendation 3** and will continuously work towards integrating gender equality and women's empowerment as a development accelerator. As part of this effort, UNDP country offices and regional hubs will prioritize investments in strengthening government capacities to formulate and implement public policies that deliver for all. The Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions will target public institutions and provide a concrete road map to mainstream gender equality. UNDP will leverage the data on public policy responses collected and analysed by the UNDP—UN-Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker to open political, economic and environmental policy dialogues at the national level with public institutions and other social actors. Through the new Gender and Crisis Engagement Facility, UNDP will invest more in tailoring its responses in crisis contexts to the specific situation of women and girls, with transformational approaches to increase women's leadership, economic empowerment and access to justice.

To equip senior leaders with knowledge on how to expand and further articulate the benefits of integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women as accelerators of sustainable development, UNDP will introduce a course on leadership for gender equality, targeting resident and deputy resident representatives.



Management Response



Recommendation

4

Global Policy Network and country support platforms. UNDP should make more effective use of its Global Policy Network to improve mobility of expertise, with greater programming rigour through well-defined targets, milestones and effectiveness measures. In addition, a more comprehensive and strategic approach should be promoted for the establishment of country support platforms, by advancing their conceptual framework and criteria for assessment and by providing mechanisms for practical support and guidance to promote portfolio- and systems-based approaches.

UNDP should improve the deployment of internal expertise across regions and strengthen incentives to facilitate the mobility of policy advisers from one region to another. It should make better use of the expertise residing in country offices, by creating systems and incentives, making sure that the mobility policy reaches national officers. Global policy centres should be more effectively connected to the Global Policy Network infrastructure, ensuring that the network becomes a conduit that brings policy centres closer to the regional hubs and country offices. Likewise, options should be explored for fostering closer synergies between the policy network infrastructure and the other systems for financial and human resource management. UNDP should sharpen its key Global Policy Network tools by improving guidance and the flow of information, and the creation of incentives for better use of the system.

For country support platforms to achieve desired results, UNDP should establish a comprehensive package of support for country offices that includes practical guidance, advisory and technical support, and provision for in-country coaching, if needed. This should include incentives for the involvement of regional hubs, global policy centres and other United Nations agencies with the support platforms at the country level. The platforms will need to be supported by a comprehensive system for monitoring their performance and results at the country and global levels through the annual reporting mechanism and the integrated results and resources framework.

The sustainability of existing country support platforms should be consistently assessed based on good practices, and country offices should be required to have adequate sustainability plans in place for their platforms that are vetted by the regional and global support teams. Country support platforms should be tied more closely to the regional bureaux and be coordinated through them. Finally, an effective interface is needed for the interaction between the Global Policy Network and the country support

platforms. As a foundation for this interface, it will be necessary to improve the awareness and knowledge of country offices and their partners about the platforms and the network.

UNDP agrees with **recommendation 4**. This ambition for the Global Policy Network is aligned with, and reflected in, the vision of UNDP as a learning organization, which is one of the key pillars of People for 2030. The strategy is aligned with business needs and capacity gaps identified through regular capacity mapping and capacity assessment exercises across the organization. The focus of the 2021-2023 people development strategy is on staff having ownership of their development journeys, with managers and the organization at large playing an enabling and supporting role, including through the systems, tools and processes of the Global Policy Network.

The country support platforms have contributed to new tools to design, manage and evaluate interventions of a systemic nature. The process of analysing complex and “wicked” problems incorporates a systemic approach in mapping, deep listening and sense-making. UNDP will advance the learning and experience of the country support platforms through integrated platforms that contribute to navigating complex challenges by cultivating and managing rich networks of actors with a focus on wider relational dynamics across many entities; break down silos through co-creation processes; and tap into the collective intelligence of the United Nations ecosystem through an integrated portfolio approach.

Results-based management and learning. UNDP should holistically redesign its entire results and performance monitoring and reporting framework and system, with (a) indicators better aligned to the timeliness and utility of data and methods that can help more credibly measure results; (b) more ambitious milestones; and (c) greater focus and guidance for consistently capturing and promoting learning for country offices to improve results and accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Monitoring and reporting should be augmented with the country programme as the unit of analysis. The organization should monitor and report on how many country programmes have met their annual milestones and country programme results for those completing cycles, while tracking those that have not. While one system reporting on aggregate



Management Response



Recommendation



Management Response



corporate-level data will still be required, attention needs to be given towards making it more useful for individual countries to learn from each other and improve results. Lessons should be shared and the information used to reprioritize support and resources to countries where efforts have fallen short of targets. Such an approach would align with the rationale of the Strategic Plan based on development settings and would constitute a more robust way to assess the performance of the organization and help countries to achieve and/or improve results.

In addition, UNDP should work with intermediate outcomes that can be more credibly linked to its interventions using more adequate indicators and targets, supported with robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. The indicators of the integrated results and resources framework will need to be redesigned to give the right attention to country-level reporting, and to the efficiency and effectiveness of country offices' delivery of programmes and results. An improved results assessment and reporting system should be designed to integrate with the new enterprise resource planning system and the wide range of existing dashboards, tools and instruments, including audits, evaluations and corporate surveys.

This will require additional human resources, personnel with the right capacities on monitoring and reporting and investments in new ways to measure progress against signature areas of work. Furthermore, UNDP can more rigorously measure and report on its concrete contributions to each of the Sustainable Development Goals it commits to. The forthcoming revision of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group handbook on results-based management and the new quadrennial comprehensive policy review present an opportunity for UNDP to engage in system-wide discussions to develop a results-based management framework that helps organizations and programmes countries learn and accelerate results towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNDP welcomes the evaluation's acknowledgement of its continuous efforts to strengthen results-based management and systems and acknowledges **recommendation 5**. UNDP is strongly committed to General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, which underscores the importance of results-based management. UNDP will be guided by the resolution with regard to the system-wide performance and results in relation to the 2030 Agenda.

The design of UNDP results-based management and relevant systems has been guided by and adheres to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Results-based Management Handbook. As requested by the Executive Board in its decision 2017/6, the approaches to results reporting on the strategic plan were harmonized with those of UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women, along with the architecture of their integrated results and resources frameworks.

UNDP acknowledges the challenges related to the current results-based management approach and systems, including unavailability of timely data of several Sustainable Development Goal indicators at the impact and outcome levels. In the past, UNDP has demonstrated tangible results and showcased consistent achievements in transparency and accountability, solidifying its position as a strong partner and key player in United Nations development system reform. In designing the integrated results and resources framework for the strategic plan, 2022-2025, UNDP will improve several elements, building on the solid results architecture and database built in 2018-2021.

In accordance with the 2020-2023 information technology strategy, UNDP will holistically redesign current the results planning, monitoring and reporting systems by leveraging the new enterprise resource planning system and streamlining a wide range of existing platforms. This new architecture will enhance capability for results planning, performance monitoring and sharing lessons and learning to improve results at all levels and increase transparency. Underpinned by a new central repository of data for both operations and programmes, a knowledge management platform, benefiting from the use of artificial intelligence, will enable UNDP personnel to learn lessons across the organization and to share valuable knowledge and experience. Modernized collaboration platforms will accelerate knowledge-sharing by connecting people who can contribute more effectively together to further improve decision-making and increase programme and project performance and results.

Management and operations. To deliver fully on the promise in the Strategic Plan to evolve and innovate its business model, UNDP should fully operationalize adaptive management, additional funding models and financing capabilities to support systems transformation for countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This should address constraints to the funding of integrated programmes, portfolios, platforms and innovation and allow the organization to move away from operating mainly with projectized funding.

6

Recommendation



Management Response



It will be important for UNDP to recommit to timelines and prioritize the completion of key management and operations workstreams that were delayed even before the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that the right enabling operational systems, policies, processes and staff mindsets are in alignment to secure the timely deployment of adequate human and financial resources. This is particularly important for the clustering of operational services, given the financial and other benefits that will accrue to UNDP and partners on completion. The proposed clustering of human resources, finance and procurement services should be completed in all regions as quickly as reasonably practicable, and the risk of further delays mitigated. The continued attention of senior management and the Office of Human Resources is essential if the completion of the clustering process is to be concluded without further delay and in a way that secures the full benefits for the organization in all regions.

In time to allow for submission along with the new strategic plan, UNDP should engage in structured discussions with the Executive Board about different approaches to the allocation of resources that better reflect the complexity, vulnerability, risk and uncertainty of different development settings. This should address constraints to the funding of integrated programmes, portfolios, platforms and innovation and allow the organization to move away from mainly operating with projectized funding. Greater attention from central and regional bureaux should be given to partnerships that would allow donors to align their funding to specific country programmes, country support platforms and accelerator labs with strategic interest in particular national needs and contexts. Furthermore, it will be important to strengthen UNDP results-based budgeting capabilities, beyond the review of the integrated results and resources framework and particularly at the country level, concretely linking resources to a more adequate level of intermediate results that can measure the value for money of UNDP contributions to results.

UNDP agrees with **recommendation 6**. Increasing the levels of quality funding (un-earmarked and lightly-earmarked resources) forms an important part of the overall UNDP resource mobilization strategy. It aligns with the funding compact and the mutual commitment between Member States and the wider United Nations development system towards increasing the share of regular resources and thematic and pooled funding.

In support of the next strategic plan, UNDP will continue to emphasize the importance of flexible and predictable funding, noting its alignment with the funding compact. This includes efforts to encourage multi-year pledges and agreements, as well as contributions to thematic and pooled funding. In line

with the management responses to the evaluation of UNDP development cooperation in middle-income countries (DP/2020/22) and the evaluation of UNDP support for climate change adaptation ([DP/2021/7](#)), UNDP will factor the broader topic of the allocation of programme funding to countries in its engagement with the Executive Board on the integrated resources plan and integrated budget, 2022-2025 and its midterm review.

In line with the evaluation's recommendation and as part of the design of the new strategic plan, UNDP is taking concrete steps to shift from a project-driven approach to fundraising and advocacy at the portfolio level, supporting efforts to attract better-quality funding that is less projectized and less transactional. UNDP has developed a portfolio acceleration protocol that has been rolled out to 40 offices and should continue to leverage it as a strategic asset. UNDP will explore using new and existing mechanisms and platforms to mobilize and channel funds to strategic initiatives as opposed to small individual projects. These strategic initiatives or "portfolio offers" in areas of work that best demonstrate the UNDP comparative advantage will be shaped by broad-based consultation with partners who share common priorities, while meeting UNDP strategic and corporate objectives.

In 2019, UNDP established the SDG Finance Sector Hub to bring coherence and scale to its work on financing for the Goals. UNDP supports countries with tailored service offers to advance financing for the Goals across different development contexts including fragile and conflict-affected countries and small island developing States. The service offers include flagship initiatives such as integrated national financing frameworks to align public financing to the Goals; "SDG Impact" to bring in the private sector; the Insurance and Risk Finance Facility to build resilience from national to local levels; and exploring the potential of digital finance with UNCDF.

People management and capabilities. In recognition that the main asset of UNDP is its workforce, the organization should timely deliver on its "People for 2030" and learning and development strategies that can improve staff capabilities for systems thinking and transformation; reward high-performance that is results-focused; and enable an innovative culture within the organization.

The UNDP Office of Human Resources should have direct representation at the Executive Office or at least within the Organizational Performance Group, with the Director being a full member, ensuring that every organizational decision is informed directly by the "people perspective" and to help address the risk-averse and conflict-avoidance organizational culture.

7

Recommendation



Management Response



Management, working closely with the cohort of next generation leadership, human resource business partners, “people champions” and the Global Policy Network, needs to ensure the right resources and capabilities, including improved policies and tools to support a cultural change, and talent management to better hold people accountable for their performance and behaviour. There should be clearer linkages between performance and results and between career opportunities and development.

An additional learning and development offer for programmatic and technical areas needs to be implemented to enhance the knowledge and skills of programme staff to respond to crises, such as COVID-19, to further adapt to digital needs and help countries to work with foresight, complexity and uncertainty to recover from crisis, building forward better. Thus, it is imperative that more reliable learning assessment methodologies be applied to measure how learning and development initiatives enhance capacities and impact the delivery of results, with lessons learned documented and used to inform course corrections, future investment and policy decisions.

UNDP welcomes **recommendation 7**, which seeks to ensure that People for 2030 is implemented, together with learning and development strategies to improve the capabilities of its workforce.

Launched in June 2019, People for 2030 aims to progressively transform the UNDP culture and capabilities to deliver better development results by equipping UNDP with a modern, forward-looking human resource function, which is both efficient and effective, addressing the root causes of issues identified in external management reviews, audit recommendations, evaluations and in the course of an extensive internal consultation exercise.

The initial phase covers the period 2019-2021 and focuses on re-architecting UNDP policies and approaches across the field of human resource management. It concentrates on nine focus areas: (a) “strive for excellence in the work that we do”; (b) “enhance the UNDP career experience”; (c) “deploy our people strategically”; (d) “develop our people and people managers”; (e) “take care of our people”; (f) “foster and leverage our diversity”; (g) “attract and select top talent”; (h) contract modalities; and (i) human resources effectiveness and people analytics.

The second phase of the People for 2030 strategy will be aligned with the next strategic plan, focusing on the implementation of the new human resources capabilities and policies, with the aim of ensuring that UNDP capitalizes fully on its workforce, which, as the evaluation points out, constitutes its main asset, in addition to progressively driving a change in organizational culture.



About the Independent Evaluation Office

At UNDP, evaluation is critical in helping countries achieve the simultaneous eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion. By generating objective evidence, evaluation helps UNDP achieve greater accountability and facilitates improved learning from past experience. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) promotes accountability and learning by conducting independent evaluations at the country, regional, and global levels, as well as on thematic topics of particular importance to the organization. It also promotes development of evaluation capacity at the national level, and provides critical support to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).





INDEPENDENT
Evaluation Office

United Nations Development Programme

SUMMARY:

EVALUATION OF UNDP STRATEGIC PLAN 2018–2021

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