

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the final evaluation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Kyrgyz Republic 2018-2022, which is a medium-term strategic planning document that articulates the collective vision and response of the UN system to national development priorities and outlines the activities implemented by the UN in partnership with the Government of Kyrgyzstan and in close cooperation with international and national partners. The UNDAF is framed around four priority areas, each with a corresponding outcome – namely, sustainable and inclusive economic growth; good governance, rule of law, human rights and gender equality; environment, climate change, and disaster risk management; and, social protection, health and education. The evaluation assessed the achievement of expected results and the extent to which UN's contribution to the national development process under the UNDAF 2018-2022 and its outcomes has been effective, coherent, sustainable, and cost-efficient.

The evaluation was conducted by a team of three independent experts who worked closely with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), UNCT and other UN structures in the country. The process was based on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) criteria and definitions and followed norms and standards established by the UN Evaluation Group. The methodology consisted of mixed methods and involved the use of commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, questionnaires, interviews, surveys, focus group discussions, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis.

A participatory approach was used for data collection, and formulation of recommendations and lessons learned. The evaluation engaged members of the UNCT, UN staff, government officials, development partners, and representatives of human rights institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, were captured in the evaluation process. The evaluation engaged all UN agencies through individual questionnaires. 26 UN staff members participated in an online survey organized for this evaluation. Similarly, 28 Government officials, 37 civil society representatives and 8 development partners representatives participated in three separate online surveys. Additionally, individual meetings with key Government institutions were organized by the evaluators. Also, a focus group discussion was held with civil society organizations.

All possible efforts were made to minimize potential limitations to the evaluation process. A challenge encountered during the evaluation process was the inability of the evaluators to conduct field visits and have in-person interviews with key stakeholders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate these limitations, the evaluation team made use of a number of data collection instruments to enable the engagement of greater number of stakeholders – the most crucial of these instruments were surveys with staff members from UN agencies and government organizations engaged in the implementation of activities with UN agencies.

The following is a brief summary of the evaluation's main findings along the five dimensions of relevance, effectiveness (including an overview of the impact), coherence, efficiency and sustainability.

### **Programme Relevance**

With the comparative experience and expertise of 26 agencies active in the country and leveraging the capacities and assets of the entire UN Development System, the UN has become a longstanding and dedicated development partner of the Kyrgyz Republic. It has a solid history of cooperation with GoK and other national partners. Stakeholders to this evaluation noted that the UN in the country is generally perceived as a well-respected development partner which promotes international practices and standards, knowledge, and policy recommendations.

UNDAF was developed in consultation with the Government and national partners. As such, it reflects the country's priorities. Further, Kyrgyzstan's key development challenges were identified through the Country Common Assessment (CCA) process which was conducted rigorously and in a participatory fashion. Also,

UNDAF is well-aligned with the country's National Development Strategy 2018-2040 (NDS) and the Medium-Term Plan, "*Unity. Trust. Creation.*" in the areas of economic development, governance and peacebuilding, environment/DRR, and social protection. UNDAF has also been closely aligned with the Agenda 2030. UNCT has developed an Action Plan to support Kyrgyzstan's implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which is fully aligned with UNDAF four priority areas, with a clear division of labour among UN agencies, timelines and progress indicators.

A major challenge during the implementation of the current UNDAF has been the country's political instability, which has been associated with changes in government structures and a high turnover of government staff. The political instability, the crisis of October 2020 and the ensuing Covid-19 pandemic have demonstrated the importance of the flexibility and adaptability of UN planning instruments. Participants to this evaluation noted that UNDAF activities, processes and systems have been flexible and adaptive in their response to emerging priorities. One area of such flexibility has been the COVID-19 response – both its health dimension and more broadly the socio-economic response based on the foundations laid out in the Socio-Economic Response Framework.

At the operational level, the Government and the UN were quick in reactivating the DRCU group (which, as mentioned in the previous section, convenes in crisis situations). During the period March-December 2020, DRCU was able to mobilise more than USD 74 million (against an originally estimated USD 51 m) to provide a rapid response and address the most urgent needs of vulnerable population. The health sector response to COVID-19 was organized under two main coordination platforms – the Disaster Response Coordination Unit (DRCU) led by WHO in close collaboration with the MOH and the Development Partner Coordination Council Health sector group led by WHO and the World Bank. Under the leadership the MOH and technical leadership of WHO, health sector partners agreed to deliver coordinated response under the Intersectoral Interagency Contingency Plan for COVID-19. UN agencies provided quick support to key ministries such as MoH and MoES in emergency preparedness and response. At the programmatic level, the most important achievement of the UNCT was the repurposing of funds to address the immediate impact of COVID-19 and the formulation of the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Framework (SERF), despite the complex political situation in the country. The agencies conducted several rapid assessments of the pandemic's impact on a variety of sectors, and in particular vulnerable groups. Supports were provided in a range of other areas, such as food assistance, addressing gender-based violence, economic empowerment and livelihoods support for vulnerable groups, etc.

Overall, COVID-19 was a real stress test of the UN reform. It accelerated the emergence of a UNCT better equipped to deal quickly and effectively with complex challenges. For all the flexibility of the UN system in Kyrgyzstan demonstrated in response to the COVID-19 crisis during 2020, some stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation noted that the new cooperation framework has to be fundamentally reshaped to respond effectively to the country's new development landscape. Adjustments need to be re-fashioned in terms of methods and approaches used to respond to rapidly changing conditions.

The PFSD has also been aligned with the UN's four programming principles, including leave no one behind; human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment; environmental sustainability; and accountability. A key feature of the work of the UN system in Moldova has been its significant focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged people – children, youth, women, persons with disabilities, people at social risk or with health challenges, persons in detention, migrants, etc. The UN supported the Government in developing and launching reforms in the justice sector, law enforcement bodies, forensic services and the prison system to make it more efficient and human rights compliant. The UN has also supported the preparation of key legislation approved by the Parliament to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights. The UN's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has been instrumental in fostering integrated interventions, joint operational activities on developing civic education teaching methodology and materials on gender equality and non-discrimination for school students, developing gender-sensitive local development planning and budgeting by Local Self-Government, promoting gender-sensitive journalism in PVE and media production, preventing violent extremism.

However, when it comes to the actual results of the joint UN-Government work in the area of human rights, the situation is mixed. While progress has been made at the policy level with the ratification of eight of the nine core UN human rights treaties, the country has not yet acceded to the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on Reduction of Statelessness. Further, only about 20% of UPR recommendations have been fully or partially implemented.

Gender partnerships have been a strong area of focus for the UNCT in Kyrgyzstan. The Gender Thematic Group has coordinated all the efforts of UN agencies related to gender equality and empowerment of women. At the strategic level, the UN has supported the development of the new Gender Equality Strategy (GES) for the period of 2021-2030 and its Action Plan. As a result of lobbying from the UN, a permanent Council on Women's Rights and the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence was established within the Parliament to work on women's rights issues and VAWG within the national legislative and policy agenda. Other achievements of the partnership of the UN with national counterparts include the endorsement of legislation addressing gender inequality, the 30% mandatory quota for women in local councils, the Law "On Protection and Safeguarding from Domestic Violence", and the Law "On Early Marriages". In January 2020, in partnership with the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the UN and the EU launched the Spotlight Initiative, an initiative that applies a comprehensive set of approaches based on social innovation, human rights, multi-sectoral and inclusive response and survivor-centred principles to the planning, coordination, implementation and monitoring of interventions across the initiative's six outcome areas. For all the positive achievements, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and violence against children remain a persistent human rights concern, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. UN's work in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment will benefit from greater focus on results-based joint work design on the basis of hard evidence and under the coordination of the GTG. Currently, the UNDAF lacks strong indicators on gender equality, except for gender markers in the JWPs. There is also a lack of minimum standards for gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation. There is also no evidence of joint UN action for GEWE communication and advocacy guided by the Gender Theme Group in cooperation with the Communication Group.

The UN has been committed to the principle of environmental sustainability as part of its programming, implementation and operations within a context of socially equitable and environmentally responsible sustainable development. This includes taking into consideration the impacts of its operations to the environment and climate for the purpose of instituting safeguards aimed to enhance the environmental benefits of activities, avoid irreversible environmental damage, foresee adverse impacts on the communities served by the UN, and ensure sustainable use and management of natural resources.

The UN has supported national efforts to boost the accountability, transparency effectiveness, and efficiency of Kyrgyz institutions to respond to citizens' expectations for rule of law, promote and protect human rights, and ensure access to services of vulnerable population groups, especially women, youth, minorities and persons with disabilities. Despite challenging and volatile political developments, which led to the adoption of a new constitution and a presidential form of government, the UN made notable efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in the country, particularly the electoral process, the justice system and the oversight role of the Parliament.

### **Programme Effectiveness**

Overall, the UNDAF document is well-formulated and provides a comprehensive analysis of the country context, especially in the areas covered by UN activities. The document identifies with clarity the country's development needs and priorities and outlines UN's strategic approach to addressing them. The UNDAF results framework is quite extensive and complicated to navigate - it consists of 4 outcomes, 44 outcome indicators, 20 outputs and 130 output indicators. Only 86% of outcome indicators have a defined baseline and 80% have defined targets. Similarly, not all output indicators have properly defined baselines and targets. Only 100 output

indicators (77%) fully meet the SMART criteria. The other 30 have shortcomings in at least one dimension of the SMART criteria. The challenges with indicators, baselines and targets noted above are further compounded by the lack of data on the indicators identified in the UNDAF results framework, in particular disaggregated data about gender, migration, and other dimensions related to vulnerable groups.

Several participants from the agencies noted that reporting at the level of the UN is done in a rather fragmented and artificial way. Typically, at the end of the year, the agencies send to the RCO activity reports for what they have done during the year. In addition, the agencies have to do their own reporting, which adds to the burden of reporting they face. On the basis of agency reports, the RCO has to put together a coherent story of what was achieved by the UN system as a whole. For the RCO it is difficult to distil from agency reports evidence of progress and joint work under the UNDAF in line with the JWPs and the joint results framework. The RCO struggles in taking activity reports from the agencies and trying to frame some results language around what has been done by the UN system in the country. In way, with the exception of the really joint programmes reviewed further in this report, the annual reports are designed to “make it look” like the UN system has done some work together.

Summarizing the impact of the work of the UN system in the Kyrgyz Republic is challenging for several reasons. First, at this stage, the UNDAF cycle is still ongoing, whereas solid results will take years to materialize and become sustainable. A rigorous quantitative assessment of impact requires a large amount of data collected through dedicated surveys, an exercise which falls outside the scope of this evaluation. Second, as noted above, it is a significant challenge to construct a cohesive story of the work of the UN system in Kyrgyzstan knowing that, although undertaken in the framework of UNDAF, UN agencies’ activities are largely pursued separately according to agency country programme and plans. Typically, the RCO constructs UNDAF annual reports by stitching together agency reports it receives every year from individual agencies. The UN annual reports are developed on the basis of agency activity reports, framing those activities in “results” terms in an artificial way. This is also reflected in the way the achievements are described in this section using evidence from the UN’s annual reports. Third, the areas covered by the UN agencies are so broad and encompass such a variety of issues and sectors, that it is impossible to do justice to everything that is done by the UN in an assessment like this one. Given these challenges, the report provides a summary of the main achievements of the UN system based on qualitative information obtained primarily through the UNDAF annual reports and, to a lesser extent, interviews with stakeholders.

Out of the 130 output indicators monitored under the UNDAF, 46 indicators (36%) had been achieved as of the end of 2020 and another 38 indicators (29%) were partially achieved. The likelihood of the achievement of the other 46 indicators by the end of 2022 is uncertain.

In the area of *Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Growth*, the focus of the UN’s work has been on the promotion of economic growth and creation of decent work and job opportunities. In partnership with Government bodies, the UN has contributed to the development of policies and strategies and ratification of international agreements and protocols. The UN supported the capacities of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) to better access innovative, energy-efficient and cost-effective green technologies such as value chains for sewing production, bio-gas equipment for cooking, bakeries and greenhouses, as well as trade support services to companies to increase their export potential. Farmers' groups and processors gained access to finance through a small grants programme in collaboration with local financial institutions, and to processing, storage and conservation, and cooling equipment. Support to business development projects in tourism, agriculture, education, food processing, textiles and trade led to creation of additional jobs, including women. The UN supported the decentralization of pasture management, which strengthened pasture governance with determination and collection of pasture use fees. The UN supported the development of tourism management plans and green policies. The UN also supported pastoral communities to become less dependent on livestock and to better adapt to climate change through the adoption of green technologies. In the area of food security and nutrition, the UN supported the monitoring of food prices, development of the Food

Security Atlas, development of a regulatory framework for school gardening, dissemination of breastfeeding and complementary feeding recommendations to health facilities, development of guidelines on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), etc.

In the area of ***Good Governance, Rule of Law, Human Rights and Gender Equality***, UN agencies have focused on enhancing accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency of state institutions to respond to citizens' expectations for rule of law, justice, and peace. The UN supported parliamentary and local elections in 2020-2021 by improving the capacities of electoral administration bodies and enhancing inclusion, integrity & transparency of electoral operations and by assisting Kyrgyz citizens including women, youth, migrants, PwD to exercise voting rights. The capacity of the Central Election Commission (CEC) was strengthened by modernization & massive trainings on voter registration equipment, improving external communication, introducing ICT solutions for voter lists, campaign finance, engagement platforms, cybersecurity. Massive information campaigns were conducted on inclusiveness, women's participation & representation, voter education, registration of migrants. The UN system supported the Parliament to better exercise its oversight functions and establish mechanisms for engagement with civil society. The UN supported the preparation of important legislation approved by the Parliament to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights. The UN provided support to national legal and judicial institutions to harmonize new legislation regarding criminal and administrative law, increase public interaction with vulnerable and business community groups, and monitor legal reform to enable evidence-based strategic planning and policymaking. The UN supported a review of the national criminal justice practices leading to identification of the systemic gaps and inconsistencies in the criminal legislation. As a result of UN's work, thousands of citizens have benefitted from free legal aid services, including women and people with disabilities, and victims of human trafficking. This work has enhanced access to justice and fewer grievances among the citizens. There has been a noticeable increase in awareness of citizens about human rights and gender issues, and hence effective voice of the citizens and better oversight of the government's decisions and policies.

The UN has supported the Government's commitment to ensure full participation of women and girls in the society and expanding their rights and opportunities. The UN advocated for instituting a 30% gender quota in local councils based on a law that was endorsed by the Parliament. With UN support, Emergency GBV Mobile Groups consisting of police officers, health, social workers and psychologists were deployed to support SGBV female survivors and their children. The UN assisted the development of state policies to prevent violent extremism and sustain peace anchored on social cohesion and civic engagement. It also contributed to strengthening communities' resilience to violent ideologies by enhancing their meaningful participation in local development and providing income generation opportunities with focus on youth. The Kyrgyz Republic was the first country to end statelessness in the world. The UN supported the Government in improving the birth registration process, thus preventing childhood statelessness.

In the area of ***Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management***, UN agencies have contributed to improving environmental and disaster management policies, strategies and legal frameworks, as well as data management system for evidence-based decision-making. Kyrgyzstan has approved the Regulation that puts conditions in place to generate and supply electricity using renewable sources. Accountability systems for sustainable forest management were promoted at the national level, combined with training on natural resource and livelihood management, demonstration of farmer field schools and advocacy campaigns on the effective use of land and water resources. The UN's engagement at the policy level also included the ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol that commits the country to cut production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons by more than 80 per cent over the next 30 years.

With UN support, the National Concept on Protection of Population and Territories of the Kyrgyz Republic from Natural Disasters and Emergencies 2018-2030 was adopted by the Government, based on the priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Crisis Management Centre's Information Analysis and Management System of MES was upgraded to improve inter-agency cooperation and improve access to

open disaster statistics data. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the UN conducted a strategic assessment to identify and prioritize hazards by risk level and guide risk-informed planning, capacity building and allocations of resources at national and province level. The UN has also supported environmental protection and climate change and resilience practices in rural communities.

In the area of *Social Protection, Health and Education*, UN agencies have provided support in addressing citizens' vulnerabilities throughout the life cycle with a focus on those residing in rural areas and the most vulnerable. UN agencies have supported the efforts of national partners to ensure that children, young persons, women and vulnerable people are in school, learning, training or have gainful employment and receive quality education and skills, have access to necessary learning conditions, including adequate nutrition. The focus has been on those left behind, including girls, the poorest, those with disabilities, children left behind by migrant parents, children being trafficked or engaged in child labour. The UN agencies have prioritized policy dialogue, generating evidence and analysis for more accurate measurement of poverty, and contributing to the improvement of the situation of poorest families with children in remote rural areas. The UN agencies have supported the development policies, strategies and legal frameworks, as well as data management system for evidence-based decision-making in the social protection, health and education sectors.

In the area of education, UN's assistance has focused on early childhood development and primary and secondary levels education. In partnership with development partners, the UN supported the Ministry of Education and Science to undertake a comprehensive education sector analysis to inform the elaboration of the sector development strategy beyond 2020, assisted in further digitalization of education through strengthening EMIS as part of the "Tunduk" initiative and pre-testing e-assessment tool in Issyk-Ata. Also, the UN has provided assistance to enhance schools' technical and management capacity to provide improved nutritious meals to primary school children. In the health sector, the Universal Health Coverage was at the centre of UN's efforts to support the Government of Kyrgyz Republic to develop the fourth-generation health reform program "Healthy Person – Prosperous Country". The UN conducted strategic assessments to identify key hazards and conducted capacity building activities. The UN provided support to conducted Intra-Action Reviews of the country COVID-19 response in 2020 and Measles outbreak in 2019 jointly with key stakeholders from the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the UN supported the Ministry of Health and Social Development in introduction and scale up high-impact interventions to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity such as Confidential Enquire into Maternal Deaths and Near Miss Case Reviews at the hospital level. Activities were undertaken to improve sexual reproductive health and HIV services at the primary health care level, including capacity building and community empowerment of key populations. The UN supported the national response to HIV and tuberculosis through the procurement of high-quality diagnostic tests, antiretroviral tests and second-line tuberculosis medicines. In the area of nutrition, the UN assisted in the development of the Law on Protection of Breastfeeding and Regulation of the Breastmilk Substitutes. Hygienic requirements on manufacturing, storage, transportation and selling of iodized salt were also developed.

### **Programme Coherence**

Since the launching of the UNDS reform in 2018, good progress has been made in strengthening the coherence of the UN system in the Kyrgyz Republic. However, when asked to identify the most significant challenge in the work of the UN system in the country, the most common response provided by Government officials involved in this evaluation was the "overlap" or "lack of coordination" between agencies. This is an indication that Government counterparts do see in clear terms the need for more effective coordination between the agencies. CSOs engaged in this evaluation were critical of the quality of coordination of UN agencies. The lack of effective coordination is characteristic of both government agencies and development partners, including the UN. Although the agencies are generally keen on more coordination and cooperation with each other, they are primarily motivated by their own interests and place them above the interests of the whole UN system. This is evident in the way they plan, implement, track and report their activities – all these functions are primarily driven by internal imperatives and guidelines rather than requirements that relate to the whole of the UN.

While the agencies have their own planning tools agreed with their government counterparts, the UNDAF has served as an overarching framework that encompasses the work of all the agencies. UN agencies engaged for this evaluation referred to the UNDAF as a reference document for their programmatic work. However, drawing references to the UNDAF when developing programme documents is not a strong indicator of alignment given that the UNDAF framework is too broad. In general, collaboration between the agencies is usually not a result of a common reading of the UNDAF, but a result of concrete opportunities for financing, joint actions and common interests. For the agencies, the most essential planning tools are their own planning documents, agreed with their line ministries and other counterparts. Although the number of joint programmes and initiatives has increased, there is potential for more joint programming.

Under these conditions, achieving meaningful and harmonized planning at the level of the UNDAF is challenging. Complementarities should be strengthened to enable agencies to fully implement their mandate while working together. Participants of this evaluation pointed out the need for the RGs to step up in playing a greater role in planning and, particularly, joint planning, rather than just monitoring and reporting, which is the case currently. Despite the structural challenges noted above, there are opportunities for improvement and stronger coordination in the planning process. At a fundamental level, the UNCT should promote a higher degree of awareness among UN staff members about the UN reform and its implications for joint delivery. The RCO is well-positioned to facilitate this process through some targeted training. Further, the agencies should interact, communicate and collaborate more effectively on the planning process. They should open their programme planning and project design process to other agencies and the RCO. The role of results groups in planning should be strengthened to ensure that planning under the UNDAF is not done as the sum of agency plans, but as a process that consolidates and integrates the efforts of the agencies. The RCO should become more involved in the facilitation of communications and flow of information among UN agencies on planning matters. It should also keep track of agencies' planning processes and timelines, provide regular updates to agencies and identify opportunities for inter-agency consultations. The RCO could also facilitate a more harmonious alignment of UN planning processes with government planning approaches at the sectoral and national level. The RCO could also organize more frequent team-building initiatives at the level of the UNCT.

### **Programme Efficiency**

The full implementation of the UNDAF was estimated to require a total of USD 221 m, which included USD 75 m committed from core and non-core resources and an estimated funding gap of USD 145 m. For the period 2018-2020, the UN system in the Kyrgyz Republic has spent a total of USD 157 m (excluding Covid-19 spending for 2020), which represents about 70% of the total amount expected to be mobilized under the UNDAF. This amount of expenditure indicates a good resource mobilization performance, as based on this trend the UNCT is expected to surpass the UNDAF mobilization of target of USD 221 m for the current cycle. According to the agencies, the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis affected negatively their resource mobilization efforts. However, the agencies were quick in reacting to the crisis by adjusting their programming and budgets. More than half of the UN's annual financial support for Kyrgyzstan in 2020 was re-purposed to the COVID-19 response through DRCU's USD 67.4 m Response and Recovery Plan, in full agreement and coordination with the Government. Remaining response activities were embedded into the SERF, for which the UN mobilized USD 48 m, including additional repurposed funds by UN agencies.

The UNDAF document envisaged the development of a joint resource mobilization and strategy, which would explore and promote government cost-sharing and stronger partnerships with the private sector, including individual donors and corporate partners, to address funding gaps for the planned outcomes, and related programmes and projects. Such a strategy has not materialized yet. At the time of this evaluation, the RCO was leading the development of a Joint UN Resource Mobilization/Financing and Partnerships Strategy (RMPS). Given the significant delay, it is unlikely that the RMPS will become a fully operational tool in the ongoing cycle. Any major actions in the strategy will likely not get implemented in the current cycle due to the insufficient time until the end of the cycle.

The total amount of money spent by all agencies shown in the table amounted to about 66% of what they had planned on an annual basis. Part of the explanation for this was that following the pandemic and the development of the SERF, agencies rapidly expanded their resource mobilization targets in anticipation that they would raise substantial new funds to address the pandemic. This did not materialize, resulting in a greater projection of resources, while actuals raised remained limited compared to that. Going forward, it will be useful for the UNCT to track expenditure at the level of the UN on a regular basis. For this it should establish the right monitoring mechanisms to be able to track overall expenditure across agencies. The agencies should cooperate by providing the information to the RCO on a regular basis and assisting with the analysis.

### **Programme Sustainability**

One of the key challenges identified by the UN agencies operating in the country is the availability of funding. As core funding remains quite limited, several agencies rely primarily on unpredictable donor-based funding for their activities in the Kyrgyz Republic. In these conditions, government cost-sharing seems to be the most sustainable funding option for many of the UN agencies going forward. A number of agencies have already received cost-sharing from the government. However, in the conditions of increased public debt due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Government's fiscal space will remain constrained with limited opportunities for cost-sharing. Going forward, the UNCT needs to expand its financial capacity to respond to the demands of national partners for support and expertise. Measures towards this should be spelled out in the Joint Resource Mobilization/Financing and Partnerships Strategy (RMPS) currently being developed under the coordination of the RCO.

The activities of the agencies in the current programme cycle have had a significant focus on innovations and piloting. The basic assumption behind these activities is that successful initiatives will be replicated, scaled up and institutionalized. There have been a number of good examples, where piloted schemes have become institutionalized as part of formal government structures funded through the state budget, thus ensuring their sustainability in the long-run. There are also initiatives for which it is not always obvious how they will be replicated and scaled up. Some pilots do not get fully integrated into national structures, which can then take them forward sustainably, but remain operated by the UN. Overall, there is a need to design pilot initiatives more carefully to ensure that they become systemic, scaled up or replicated and that effects do not remain limited in scale and scope. Crucial for the scaling up of piloted interventions is that their design include a clear plan for what is expected from the pilot initiative and how they are expected to be replicated. The agencies should also establish an effective system for tracking the performance of pilot initiatives over time.

UN's work in this cycle has had a significant focus on the development of policies across a range of sectors and areas. Getting changes embedded at the level of formal policies or laws is a crucial requirement for sustainability, because it creates obligations for public institutions and actors to act on the prescriptions of those laws and policies. However, it is not enough - what matters ultimately is to get those laws and policies implemented in an effective fashion. The implementation of the existing legal and policy framework is a serious challenge. While many laws and policies are already in place, only a part of them gets fully implemented. Weak implementation was brought up as a challenge for government and non-government partners many times during interviews for this evaluation.

One challenge pointed out by participants of this evaluation was the limited engagement of government officials with the UNDAF structures and processes, due to several factors, especially political instability. Government officials also noted that there is limited engagement of Government representatives in the monitoring of UNDAF initiatives. This lack of strong coordination leads to longer periods needed for the agreement of various projects – this point was raised a few times by Government officials engaged in this evaluation. Overall, there is a need for more effective communications with the Government, especially the political leadership, starting with the Joint Steering Committee meetings which haven't been convened for a while.



From the UN's perspective, CSOs have actively participated in all stages of UNDAF design and implementation. Engagement with CSOs is complemented by ad hoc issue-based consultations to quickly respond to human rights violation cases and other challenges to the normative values of the UN. Furthermore, for some agencies the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the diversification of partnerships with CSOs. However, the external situation for civil society in the country has become more challenging in the last few years. CSOs are increasingly facing challenges due to Government legislative initiatives aimed at diminishing civic space and limiting public participation and access to information. In light of this deterioration of the environment for the operations of civil society, some civil society representatives involved in this evaluation thought that the UN has not responded effectively to the interests of civil society and has not contributed sufficiently to the widening of democratic space in the country. Another important section of the society that has the potential to play a greater role in the country's development process is the private sector. Although the UNCT has made some progress in involving private sector companies in its activities, the overall engagement of the private sector by the UN system under the UNDAF has been limited. The UN and GoK should identify ways for channelling the resources and contributions of the private sector more effectively towards the country's development objectives.

Development partners engaged in this evaluation appreciate the role of the UN in the country and the close relations that the UN agencies have forged with national partners. Development partners use the UN "to open doors" to national entities. However, there is the room for more effective coordination and information-sharing with development partners. Some development partners think that the UN could play a greater role in development effectiveness. The UN system could further support the government in improving its coordination capabilities under the DPCC platform. Also, UNDAF structures and DRCU can be strengthened to allow for more effective engagement of donors. UN's partnership with IFIs could also be further strengthened. Development partners also raised the need for more and better information from the UN, especially with regards to the results that the UN system is producing in the country.

This evaluation provided an opportunity for drawing some important lessons from the experience of the UNCT with the current programme which may be used in the development of the new cooperation framework. The following are a couple of key lessons identified in the course of this evaluation.

**Lesson 1:** The structure of funding is a critical factor in rallying UN agencies to work together. The fragmented nature of UN funding is a serious shortcoming that impedes joint implementation. However, the COVID-19 crisis served as a rallying factor for UN agencies by combining joint funding with a joint purpose for the UN agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that it is important to strengthen national preparedness, anticipatory action and contingency planning in order to be able to take a fast response when new emergencies occur. Going forward, it will be important to strengthen UN's role in humanitarian settings allowing integrated critical assistance in multiple sectors based on the agencies' comparative advantages. It will also be important to maintain this spirit of cooperation and extend it to the planning and implementation of the new programme.

**Lesson 2:** The UN cooperation framework guidance 2 talks about "integrated programming". How are the current UNDAF work process aligned to "integrated programming" and what should UNCT in the Kyrgyz Republic be doing differently to enhance "integrated programming"? While planning is done jointly by the agencies in the form of JWPs under the UNDAF, it is clear to everyone involved in this evaluation that for the most part the implementation of the UN programme in the Kyrgyz Republic is done individually by the agencies on the basis of their own country programmes (or sometimes even regional programmes). As noted in this report, once the work plans are approved, the agencies run with their own country programmes towards implementation. Further, reporting at the level of the UN is done in a rather fragmented and artificial way, with the agencies sending to the RCO activity reports at the end of the year. For the RCO it is difficult to distil from agency reports evidence of progress and joint work under the UNDAF in line with the JWPs and the joint results framework. The RCO struggles in taking activity reports from the agencies and trying to frame some results language around what has been done by the UN system in the country. In way, with the exception of the really

joint programmes reviewed further in this report, the annual reports are designed to “make it look” like the UN system has done some work together. The Spotlight Initiative is a good example of “joint programming” in the way it was conceived, the way it was developed, the way it was clustered into pillars, and the way its activities are carried out. However, as has been noted in the report, this initiative has generated some reaction among the implementing agencies due to its “integrated” nature and the “loss of full control” by the agencies. What this indicates is that integration (and joint implementation) comes with some reaction to it and it will take time for new ways of implementing and a new mindset of cooperation to set in.

Based on the analysis presented in this report, this evaluation report provides the following recommendations for the consideration of the PFSD stakeholders.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

#### ***Improve UNDAF’s results framework and results-based management practices***

- Going forward, this framework should be simplified both in terms of the number of indicators and the way they are framed.
- For a framework of this importance, it will be essential for the UNCT to develop a complete results framework, with all baselines and targets determined and defined upfront.
- This shortcoming should be addressed in the upcoming UNSDCF by aligning the indicators with the country’s SDG framework.
- Another observation derived from this assessment is the importance of identifying meaningful and solid UNDAF indicators that meet the SMART criteria.
- Thus, another suggestion going forward is to reduce the number of JWP activities and improve their relevance by broadening them to a level that allows several agencies to work under one activity line.
- When it comes to the output and activity levels, there are no direct and solid indicators related to gender equality or other LNOB dimensions, except gender markers used in the JWPs.
- Although some attempts have been made by the agencies to introduce methodologies for the tracking of UNDAF expenditure on the basis of gender, this is an area that requires improvement in the next programme cycle.
- The overall opinion of UN stakeholders involved in this evaluation is that the MEG group is relatively weak and not very active. There is also a lack of clear understanding among stakeholders about the division of labour between the MEG group and RGs. Evaluation participants highlighted the need for strengthening the M&E group, especially its coordination function across M&E systems of individual agencies. The M&E related challenges identified in this report point to the need for further training for M&E group members.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

#### ***Strengthen the inter-agency coordination and cooperation infrastructure***

- Agencies should engage more effectively with the joint coordination mechanisms – they should allocate the necessary resources and staff time to the UN coordination process.
- There is a need for a more regular, predictable and structured engagement of Government officials with the UNDAF process through the RGs. Also, the UNCT needs to consider ways and means for a more effective engagement of non-governmental stakeholders with the RGs.

- The focus of RG meetings should be more on joint programming, especially when financing opportunities for such programmes arise. Their role in planning should be strengthened to ensure that planning under the UNDAF is not done as the sum of agency plans, but as a process that consolidates and integrates the efforts of the agencies.
- The agencies should interact, communicate and collaborate more effectively on the planning process.
- UNCT should promote joint programming by identifying and institutionalizing incentives for the agencies to engage in joint programmes. RCO could supplement this process with training for agency staff on modalities and approaches of joint programming.
- There is a need to review existing inter-agency thematic groups with a view to streamlining the overall functioning of the coordination infrastructure, optimizing the division of labour and ensuring greater synergies in the coordination process.
- There is also an opportunity to assess the performance of the inter-agency coordination infrastructure in light of existing DPCC mechanisms.
- The RCO should become more involved in the facilitation of communications and flow of information among UN agencies on planning matters. The RCO should also keep track of agencies' planning processes and timelines, provide regular updates to agencies and identify opportunities for inter-agency consultations. The RCO could also facilitate a more harmonious alignment of UN planning processes with government planning approaches at the sectoral and national level. The RCO role in planning process needs to be enhanced and contribute to the harmonisation of planning.
- UNCT should promote a higher degree of awareness among UN staff members about the UN reform and its implications for joint delivery – i.e. key elements of the reform, its objectives, what it means for cooperation and joint implementation on the ground, etc. The RCO is well-positioned to facilitate this process through targeted training.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

#### ***Strengthen Joint Planning and Implementation***

- Under these conditions, achieving meaningful and harmonized planning at the level of the UNDAF is challenging. Complementarities should be strengthened to enable agencies to fully implement their mandate while working together.
- RGs should play a greater role in joint planning, rather than just monitoring and reporting. The role of RGs in planning should be strengthened to ensure that planning under the UNDAF is not done as the sum of agency plans, but as a process that consolidates and integrates the efforts of the agencies.
- The UNCT should promote a higher degree of awareness among UN staff members about the UN reform and its implications for joint delivery.
- The agencies should interact, communicate and collaborate more effectively on the planning process. They should open their programme planning and project design process to other agencies and the RCO.

- The RCO should encourage joint planning through targeted training. The RCO should also organize more frequent team-building initiatives at the level of the UNCT.
- The RCO should become more involved in the facilitation of communications and flow of information among UN agencies on planning matters. It should also keep track of agencies' planning processes and timelines, provide regular updates to agencies and identify opportunities for inter-agency consultations.
- The RCO should facilitate a more harmonious alignment of UN planning processes with government planning approaches at the sectoral and national level.
- RCO's and UNDP's "integrator" roles should be clearly defined, aligned and communicated to the UNCT and national counterparts.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4** *Strengthen UN's Programmatic Offer*

##### COVID-19 Response

- The joint UN-GoK response to the challenges that have emerged from the COVID-19 crisis should be central to and fully embraced by the upcoming cooperation framework.

##### Gender

- UNCT should undertake a gender assessment at the level of UNDAF to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement.
- In the upcoming cooperation framework, UNCT should mainstream gender across programmes through targeted interventions and resource allocations. UNCT should strengthen the gender aspects of the results framework by improving the disaggregation of indicators and targets. UNCT should also introduce standards for gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation under UNDAF.
- The UN should also strengthen joint GEWE communication and advocacy.

##### Other

- The new UNSDCF should cover the full spectrum of humanitarian-development-peace actions as offerings to support the Kyrgyz government to avoid inefficient parallel planning and implementation processes and tools.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5** *Step up resource mobilization*

- The UNCT should complete the development of the Joint Resource Mobilization Strategy under the coordination of the RCO. The implementation of Joint Resource Mobilization Strategy should be tracked by Results Groups.
- Agencies should approach resource mobilization in a more coordinated fashion by being more cooperative with each other under the UNDAF framework.
- Also, government co-financing should be pursued more systematically at the level of the UNCT and should become an integral part of UN's resource mobilization strategy.

- RCO should step up its role in coordinating resource mobilization among agencies by ensuring that agency efforts are harmonized and not creating overlaps.
- UNCT should explore joint implementation opportunities with IFIs active in the areas covered by the UNDAF to leverage their resources.

## **RECOMMENDATION 6**

### *Step up engagement with the Government, civil society and private sector*

#### Government

- UNCT should strengthen the engagement with the Government under the UNDAF framework.
- Depending on how the COVID-19 situation will evolve, it will be important for the UN to begin to organize regular JSC meeting even in the online format, if physical meetings with not be feasible. A review of progress made under UNDAF and a discussion of the COVID-19 recovery priorities are long overdue. Also, the findings of this evaluation and the discussion of its recommendations could be part of the agenda for the upcoming JSC meeting.
- The RGs should be redesigned to allow for a more effective participation of government counterparts;
- Better communications should be established by the UNCT with the Government especially with the political leadership.

#### Civil Society

- UN should strengthen its engagement with civil society. It will be important to have a more coherent approach at the UN level (across agencies) for how support to civil society, especially capacity building assistance, is designed and delivered. UN will explore the harmonised approach to channel the support to build capacity and network of civil society.
- UNCT should explore possibilities for engaging civil society more systematically in the UN joint coordination structures.
- UNCT should make greater efforts in consulting civil society in UN lead processes.

#### Private Sector

- UN should step up its engagement with the private sector to ensure that private sector resources are deployed more effectively towards the solution of development problems.
  - Identify potential partners among private companies with strong social responsibility
  - Build partnership with private environment-friendly private companies
  - Use partnerships with the private companies to promote women's empowerment.
  - Promote the PPP model in the public sector.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

### *Strengthen tracking of pilots and focus on policy implementation*

- The UN should track the performance of pilots over time – the lessons they generate during the piloting stage and the extent to which they get replicated and scaled up. As part of the monitoring system, the UN should seek to track pilot initiatives over time and after a pilot's lifetime. The UN should document more effectively results, lessons, experiences, and good practices and share them more widely.
- The UN should take a more systematic approach to policymaking by paying particular attention to the issue of implementation. Policy development should be clearly linked to public budgets.

The UN should also strengthen the systems that track implementation results, rather than inputs/outputs and assess more rigorously the sustainability of achievements. The UN should support the implementation capabilities of the governments and not act as a substitute for governments' shortcomings in implementation.