



Independent  
Evaluation  
Office

United Nations Development Programme

# EVALUATION OF UNDP SUPPORT FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT





Independent  
Evaluation  
Office

United Nations Development Programme

# EVALUATION OF UNDP SUPPORT **FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

## **EVALUATION OF UNDP SUPPORT FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Copyright © IEO/UNDP December 2021

The analysis and recommendations of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Development Programme, its Executive Board or the United Nations Member States. This is an independent publication by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would like to thank all those who have contributed to this review.

## IEO TEAM

**Directorate:** Oscar A. Garcia (Director) and Alan Fox (Deputy Director)

**Corporate section chief:** Ana Rosa Monteiro Soares

**Lead evaluator:** Daniel Alonso Valckx and Anna Guerraggio (former)

**Senior evaluation advisor:** Tina Tordjman-Nebe

**Associate lead evaluator:** Xiaoling Zhang

**Research consultant:** Charlotte Karagueuzian

**External peer review:** Helen Gallagher, David Hansen and Fidelis Bonaventure Uzoma

**Evaluation consultants:** Nisrine Mansour, Halcyon Louis, Nino Partskhaladze, Ganesh Rauniyar, Rafael Muñoz Sevilla and Voices That Count

**Publishing and outreach:** Kate Pond and Jaqueline Souza

**Administrative support:** Flora Jimenez and Sonam Choetsho

The IEO could not have completed the evaluation without the support of the following:

## STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

**UNDP staff:** The many UNDP staff at country, regional and headquarters offices who provided valuable insights, information and support to the evaluation.

**Other stakeholders and partners:** The IEO also would like to thank the government partners, representatives of the United Nations agencies, civil society, in particular youth, non-governmental organizations and bilateral and multilateral development partners who contributed to the evaluation.

# FOREWORD

---

The population of the world is the youngest it has ever been. Around 16 percent of the Earth's population is aged between 15 and 24 years, and the hardships and inequalities they face have only been worsened by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. One fifth of young people worldwide are not in employment, education or training, rising to two thirds in the least developed countries. Young women are the worst affected, subject to the intersection between restrictive social norms, gender inequality and the lack of opportunities.

The world is slowly recovering from the impact of the pandemic. For recovery to be sustainable, young people must be at its heart. Given their greater vulnerability, efforts to improve the economic empowerment of youth should be a key consideration as we adjust to the new normal, to ensure that truly, no one is left behind.

This report is the first comprehensive evaluation conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office to collect and analyse information about the UNDP contribution to youth economic empowerment, which includes support for entrepreneurship, employability and skills acquisition, combined with the promotion of inclusive policy change. The extent to which young people can articulate their needs and propose solutions at local and institutional levels needs to be closely monitored in order to assess progress. This evaluation sets out a series of recommendations for programmes and infrastructures to ensure that support to youth is relevant and meaningful. At the heart of recommendations to improve the inclusivity of UNDP strategic programming is the importance of balancing investment in individuals – namely training and support to entrepreneurship – with support for structural job creation. UNDP needs to do more to invest in the demand side of the equation, with interventions targeted at employment schemes and expanding public and private sector linkages to create a more enabling environment for youth.

A shift to long-term interventions that seek to lift structural barriers, combined with leveraging influence over national agendas to favour youth, will help to create this favourable environment. Efforts to match training and skills acquisition to real job market needs should be reinforced to ensure that young people have access to decent jobs, including bridging the digital divide.

Interventions targeted at youth also need to take into account gender, ethnicity and location in order to combat adverse social norms, and UNDP needs to do more to address the causes of inequality at the root. Internal UNDP systems also merit some attention. A coherent framework and set of guidelines will increase the capacity of UNDP to mainstream youth economic empowerment. Monitoring and evaluation need to be strengthened and resource mobilization improved. Strategic partnerships will also be key to mobilizing expertise and resources to achieve collective goals, including rallying Governments and the private sector around a strong youth agenda.

This is a generation at risk, but it is also a generation of hope. Where they have the opportunity, youth show an exceptional level of engagement with social and environmental issues. When youth are empowered to act, their will for meaningful change is marked. Improving youth economic empowerment will support young people to establish themselves as agents of change for a greener, more resilient and inclusive future.



**Oscar A. Garcia**  
Director, Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

---

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>BERA</b>	Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy
<b>BMS</b>	Bureau for Management Services
<b>BPPS</b>	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
<b>CIS</b>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease
<b>CPD</b>	Country programme document
<b>ESCAP</b>	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>IEO</b>	Independent Evaluation Office
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IRRF</b>	Integrated results and resources framework
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union
<b>LHSP</b>	Lebanon Host Communities Support Programme
<b>MUNIJOVEN</b>	Youth Municipal Policies Project, Guatemala (Proyecto Fortalecimiento de las capacidades municipales para el desarrollo de políticas públicas locales con énfasis en juventud)
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>NEET</b>	Youth not in employment, education or training
<b>OECD/DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
<b>RBA</b>	Regional Bureau for Africa
<b>RBAP</b>	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
<b>RBAS</b>	Regional Bureau for Arab States
<b>RBEC</b>	Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>RBLAC</b>	Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>RRF</b>	Rapid Response Facility
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprises

<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations country team
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>UNV</b>	United Nations Volunteers programme
<b>UN-Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>YLP</b>	Youth Leadership Programme
<b>Youth-GPS</b>	Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace

# CONTENTS

---

<b>ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Youth, labour and empowerment: a generation at risk	1
1.2 The UNDP approach to youth economic empowerment	5
<b>CHAPTER 2. EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Purpose, objective, scope and utility of the evaluation	10
2.2 Evaluation framework, approach and questions	10
2.3 Evaluation methodology	11
2.4 Challenges and limitations	15
<b>CHAPTER 3. ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDP CONTRIBUTION TO YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Programmatic approach	17
3.2 Programmatic results	30
<b>CHAPTER 4. ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDP STRATEGIC APPROACH AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 Strategic relevance and coherence	39
4.2 Institutional effectiveness	45
<b>CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE</b>	<b>58</b>
5.1 Conclusions	58
5.2 Recommendations and management response	62
<b>ANNEXES</b>	<b>72</b>



## FIGURES

<b>Figure 1.</b> Percentage of youth economic empowerment projects implemented over the period 2015-2021, by region	8
<b>Figure 2.</b> Thematic overview of youth economic empowerment projects (%)	9
<b>Figure 3.</b> Mapping of the countries with projects sampled for more in-depth analysis	14
<b>Figure 4.</b> IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale	15
<b>Figure 5.</b> Correlation between number of youth economic empowerment projects implemented by country offices and depth of youth unemployment at the country level	18
<b>Figure 6.</b> Distribution of youth economic empowerment projects by UNDP signature solutions and SDGs per region	26
<b>Figure 7.</b> Share of sampled socioeconomic impact assessments and response plans considering youth, by region	29

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

This is the first comprehensive attempt to gather and analyse evidence about the UNDP contribution to youth economic empowerment, decent work and livelihood creation for youth in programme countries. Youth economic empowerment – the capacity of young women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from inclusive growth and development processes – is an area of long-standing engagement for UNDP. The evaluation aims to provide UNDP management, members of the Executive Board, programme countries and other stakeholders with an assessment of the results of UNDP support to youth economic empowerment and suggests avenues for improvement. It has a twofold accountability and learning objective: first, to assess results of the past work of UNDP against its goals as stated in strategic and programmatic documents; and second, to shape organizational learning and inform the strategic direction of UNDP work on youth economic empowerment in the next Strategic Plan period (2022-2025). The evaluation assesses UNDP support to youth economic empowerment at global, regional and country levels during the period 2015-2020.

## CONTEXT

Youth are more economically vulnerable and marginalized than adults. Across countries, a sizeable share of youth are prevented from accessing education and job opportunities. This has rippling effects on their current and future well-being, economic empowerment and livelihood perspectives, reinforcing patterns of inequality. Despite their economic potential, youth (aged 15-24) are around three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. In 2019, it was estimated that 13.6 percent of the youth population (67.6 million youth) were unemployed globally and around 123 million were underemployed. They work in jobs that are precarious and/or informal and poorly paid. Such jobs do not deliver a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for families, prospects for personal development and freedom of expression, nor do they offer a stable contract or paid leave.

The number of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) stood globally at 267 million in 2019 and was estimated to have increased in 2020 to almost 270 million, one fifth of the youth population. Youth with NEET status are neither gaining experience in the labour market, nor receiving an income from work nor enhancing their education and skills. The situation is particularly concerning in least and less developed countries, where 63 and 38 percent of youth do not have adequate secondary education and employment opportunities respectively.

Globally, young women are twice as likely as young men to have NEET status. Gender norms around expected roles vis-à-vis domestic and care work, lack of infrastructure and persistent violence against women are other factors limiting their economic empowerment. Although women record a higher enrolment rate than men in secondary and higher education, they have higher rates of unemployment, underemployment and often unpaid family-based work. Their economic contribution is often undervalued. Limited access to capital and mobility restrictions also prevent them from accessing basic necessities, services and decent work.

Youth unemployment and lack of opportunities have significant social repercussions and can prevent young people from fully enjoying their rights. Beyond the individual level, they affect the prosperity,

stability and equality within a society and a country's sustainable development. The economic marginalization of young women and men is hampering their confidence in political and economic systems, fuelling youth migration and undermining social cohesion and peace. Young people constitute more than 11 percent of the world's 280 million migrants, who face further risks of exploitation and socioeconomic exclusion. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities.

The UNDP approach to youth economic empowerment is anchored in its organizational mandate and the strategic plans which operationalize that mandate. The last two strategic plans, for the periods 2014-2017 and 2018-2021, position youth economic empowerment as straddling the UNDP focus areas of poverty reduction and good governance. The UNDP investment in youth economic empowerment is estimated at around \$200 million to \$400 million per annum over the evaluation period. The UNDP Executive Group adopted its first global youth strategy at the end of 2014, aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017. The strategy highlighted youth economic empowerment as one of three outcome areas alongside participation and resilience-building. It focused on both the quantity and the quality of jobs as well as access to social protection. In 2016, UNDP launched its first youth global programme, a multilevel and multidimensional programmatic offer to promote and support youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace, as a response to the youth strategy, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and United Nations Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security. Instead of launching a second youth strategy in 2017-2018, UNDP focused on the development of the first United Nations youth strategy, "Youth2030", requested by the Secretary-General's Executive Committee. The system-wide youth strategy, which brings together all United Nations pillars, has been greatly informed by the comprehensive approach of UNDP to youth empowerment and includes a pillar on youth economic empowerment under the thematic areas (launched in September 2018).

The theory of change behind youth economic empowerment is based on the understanding that to participate in the labour market, young people need to be able to articulate their needs and propose solutions to the problems they are facing. They need to have the right capabilities, sufficient resources and enabling environments to thrive. The latter requires interventions at institutional level, through youth organizations and networks as well as work in support of policymakers, who can listen and respond to youth voices.

In sum, UNDP addresses youth economic empowerment through a three-pronged approach. First, the demand side focuses on supporting entrepreneurship and social enterprises, and includes private and public sector youth employment schemes and public employment schemes that foster economic reintegration of youth in recovery contexts. Second, the supply side includes fostering employability and addressing the skills mismatch through skills development, internships/volunteer placements and job centres. Finally, the enabling environment side includes support for institutional and policy frameworks and national strategies that favour youth employment, especially for young women and vulnerable groups, and promotion of investments in sectors with potential growth for youth employment such as information and communication technologies.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation assessed the extent to which the UNDP three-pronged approach has contributed to enhancing the psychological, behavioural and economic empowerment of youth and creating an enabling environment for poverty reduction and livelihood improvement. It considers the influence of contextual factors (assumptions and drivers) on programme and project interventions. The evaluation is framed around a modified version of the theory of change developed for the UNDP

Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (2016-2021) with the interpretation of the evaluation team based on broad stakeholder consultations.

The evaluation is guided by eight key evaluation questions in combination with four internationally-agreed standard evaluation criteria, namely relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability, plus two additional pertinent criteria, inclusiveness and innovation. The evaluation takes a mixed-methods approach inspired by contribution analysis, aiming to produce a plausible, evidence-based narrative to help explain how and why changes occurred. Data were collected and analysed through an iterative process and triangulated across different sources and methods, which included a broad multi-stakeholder consultation process. The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020) and underwent detailed ethical review.

## FINDINGS

UNDP has positioned itself to provide strategic leadership in youth engagement for youth empowerment in global platforms. Its conceptualization of the role of youth has evolved over the last decade, viewing youth as critical agents of change in line with the 2030 Agenda. This has started to reshape the UNDP partnership with youth and the focus of its interventions. UNDP has been instrumental in amplifying the voices of youth at global level. However, the potential of youth and their contribution to sustainable human development did not receive the same attention at country level, where youth are often perceived as beneficiaries rather than as partners and agents of change. (See relevant findings 11 and 12.)

UNDP has been highly aware of the most pressing challenges young people face and has made significant contributions promoting youth self-employment and entrepreneurship. Skills development interventions contributed greatly to psychological and behavioural empowerment at individual level though with fewer economic benefits. There was limited evidence of youth rising out of poverty or improving their livelihoods following participation in UNDP programmes. However, such results were not achieved at a larger scale. Moreover, UNDP made efforts to adopt a cross-sectoral approach between youth economic empowerment, key thematic areas and the “signature solutions” of the UNDP Strategic Plan. This effort yielded some encouraging results that indicate the positive potential of an integrated approach, although notable variations were observed across signature solutions. During the COVID-19 outbreak, UNDP placed youth at the centre of its country-level response and was key to mobilizing resources from various streams to complement existing resources in support of youth economic empowerment interventions. (See relevant findings 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7.)

However, the UNDP response fell short of fully addressing access to decent jobs and productive employment. Namely, UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions were skewed towards fostering employability through skills development, instead of fostering demand for labour including youth employment schemes, and paid less attention to most structural challenges. UNDP made significant contributions in promoting downstream youth self-employment and entrepreneurship while skills development interventions contributed greatly to psychological and behavioural empowerment with fewer results on economic benefits. UNDP support to improve employability and foster demand for labour primarily adopted a downstream approach with limited scope for more upstream structural responses. Those “upstream” technical advisory mechanisms for structural job creation and for initiatives aiming to enhance the quality of employment were less visible and affected by the specificities of the country contexts. The support for promoting a more conducive enabling environment was effective where contexts favourable to policymaking for youth economic empowerment already exist, but insufficient where structural challenges at national level were more severe. (See relevant findings 1, 6,7 and 8.)

There is evidence of sustainable results linked to UNDP initiatives in strengthening psychological empowerment and promoting skills development but less so for concrete economic benefits from employment or self-employment. Key factors hindering sustainability include unstable policy environments and weak political will of national actors, resource limitations that hamper replicability and scalability as well as insufficient engagement with youth before, during and after the interventions. The lack of follow-up mechanisms and data on effects on beneficiaries upon completion of activities and over time was also a serious hindrance to assessing sustainability. (See finding 9.)

UNDP made resolute efforts to integrate and mainstream the principle of leaving no one behind across regions into its youth economic empowerment portfolio. Through its youth economic empowerment interventions, UNDP has reached youth at risk and suffering from marginalization and multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities. However, UNDP work on entrepreneurship mostly tended to reach more literate, urban and digital-savvy youth – many of whom are above the age of 24. Another shortcoming was a tendency, at project level, to lump youth together with women or include youth within a vague broader category of “vulnerable groups”. This approach is symptomatic of incomplete gender and power analyses in programme design and does not do justice to the specific needs of young women. While young women benefited from various types of “downstream” support and various levels of results were achieved, there was little evidence within the youth economic empowerment portfolio of addressing the differential vulnerabilities and aspirations of young women. Similarly, UNDP did not sufficiently contribute to “upstream” change, implementation and enforcement of policies aimed at addressing social norms, cultural values and root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination affecting the livelihoods of young women. (See relevant findings 3, 4 and 12.)

The growing expertise of UNDP in leveraging social innovation in youth entrepreneurship is an added value of its work in youth economic empowerment. Efforts so far have not yet sufficiently improved inclusiveness of innovation-driven initiatives for hard-to-reach youth and to enhance systematic organizational learning from innovation initiatives. Digital exclusion of youth remains a challenge that was further heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (See relevant findings 14 and 3.)

UNDP worked well with and among the multitude of actors engaged in youth work. The organization played an active role in agenda-setting and coordination in international networks and mechanisms on youth, especially on the topics of empowerment and participation. UNDP championed youth economic empowerment at the global level through a vision anchored in a human rights-based approach and aligned with the United Nations system-wide strategy for youth. UNDP youth economic empowerment initiatives have benefited from partnerships with sister agencies, youth organizations and the private sector. However, inter-agency cooperation has not yet been fully translated at country level and there is room to further leverage private sector inputs beyond financial assets. Partnerships with youth organizations have focused mostly on programme implementation, but over recent years UNDP has been engaging them more in participation and co-creation. (See relevant findings 10, 11, 12 and 15.)

The internal coherence of UNDP policies and strategies was less evident as mainstreaming of youth has not yet been consistent and varies substantially across strategic documents at regional and country levels. UNDP has set up a dedicated institutional architecture to support youth empowerment that is not specific to economic issues. The effectiveness of the structure is affected by the lack of human resources in the youth portfolio with a dedicated focus on economic empowerment to facilitate cross-fertilization; the lack of institutionalization of the youth focal points at country level; the “upon request” nature of support provided by the regional structure; and the absence of clear financial mechanisms in support of the youth global team. Despite significant progresses with the development of the youth tracker and

the Youth 2030 scorecard, there are still important measurement gaps for the results achieved through UNDP support to youth economic empowerment. The tools and monitoring and evaluation systems (M&E) in place are unable to adequately capture the UNDP contribution to youth economic empowerment at corporate, regional and country levels. (See relevant findings 10, 12, 13 and 16.)

The findings are presented in full in chapters 3 and 4 of the report. An abridged version of the recommendations appears below; the full version of conclusions and recommendations can be found in chapter 5.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1. UNDP should prioritize interconnection and synergies between employability, job creation and enabling environment interventions, instead of stand-alone interventions focusing on capacity development or entrepreneurship.** Further emphasis is needed on the deficit of labour demand and the creation of a conducive enabling environment and self-employment ecosystems that facilitate both the quantity and the quality of jobs for young people. UNDP should prioritize long-term interventions seeking to remove structural barriers for marginalized youth, bolster social protection and address challenges of youth in the informal sector. In this vein, more attention is needed in supporting duty-bearers to ensure that youth have access to “decent work”.

UNDP should further leverage its favourable positioning to influence national agendas in favour of youth and their economic empowerment, and deploy efforts to create national consensus towards making youth economic empowerment a priority on national development agendas.

**Recommendation 2. UNDP should detail its programmatic approach towards youth economic empowerment by developing a guidance document that clarifies its ambition in various contexts and provides practical guidance for strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation.** This instrument should adopt a cross-sectoral approach to youth economic empowerment and further accelerate its transition from smaller-scale interventions to integrated policy advisory support. The guidance should focus on the most effective interventions for each type of programmatic context.

As a step towards implementing this recommendation, UNDP needs to clearly conceptualize youth economic empowerment and develop an integral theory of change on youth economic empowerment or more holistically on youth empowerment across the six signature solutions. This should serve as the basis to formulate an integral response while defining the UNDP value proposition and role, including within the wider United Nations youth strategy. UNDP may wish to include in its guidance other components of youth empowerment, beyond economic empowerment, to facilitate its cross-sectoral approach.

To ensure internal coherence, this guidance should cascade into the next generation of regional programme documents so that they give greater attention to youth economic empowerment.

**Recommendation 3. UNDP should take measures to ensure organization-wide coherence in its institutional architecture for youth across regions.** UNDP should ensure that regional youth focal points are in place and functional in all regions to effectively support country offices. Regional youth focal points should have the resources and systems in place to allow them to extend support and guidance on best practices to country offices in a proactive manner.

It will be key for UNDP to create a clear matrix of responsibility throughout the organization to facilitate the mainstreaming and coordination of youth employment issues across thematic clusters. It should



promote accountability, synergies and cross-fertilization with different teams and clusters at country, regional and global levels for effective mainstreaming of youth economic empowerment.

UNDP should also strengthen the country focal point system, ensuring that the focal points have the adequate resources and capabilities to be fully operational. The focal point responsibility should be part of the staff members' job descriptions. A guidance note and onboarding material are needed to ensure a clear understanding of the role and its effective implementation.

UNDP should increase the overall capacity of staff to understand and address the needs of youth. UNDP should integrate capacity-building components on youth programming into existing training programmes. These should include the development of a guidance note and toolkit on how to integrate youth in various areas of UNDP programming and operations beyond youth, peace and security.

**Recommendation 4. UNDP should systematically recognize the different needs of young women and how these intersect with age, ability, ethnicity/indigeneity, locality (rural/urban) and other markers. The organization should prioritize support that aspires to contribute to changes in social norms and that addresses the root causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination.** UNDP should go beyond setting up ratios for female participation in youth economic empowerment interventions and aim to address the differentiated needs of young women and men for their economic empowerment. Additionally, engaging youth, families, peers and community as agents of gender transformation is key to shifting adverse social norms and drivers of gender inequalities and discrimination. To improve the effectiveness of interventions for gender equality and empowerment of women in its youth economic empowerment portfolio, UNDP should strengthen its needs assessments and front-end analyses respectively in local contexts. Moreover, UNDP should build mechanisms to involve young women of different abilities and backgrounds from the outset to develop interventions tailored to their needs and specific challenges.

**Recommendation 5. The renewed UNDP vision on youth economic empowerment needs to further leverage strategic partnerships to foster youth agency, considering youth as agents of change and partners for development in their own right and not merely as beneficiaries.** In developing its comprehensive vision of youth economic empowerment, UNDP needs to consider mapping stakeholders against its theory of change to identify the different type of partnerships it needs to nurture so as to sustainably achieve youth economic empowerment goals. It should design its partnership strategy accordingly to ensure synergies and to mobilize necessary expertise or resources. Instead of one-off project-based partnerships, UNDP should identify areas of synergy for regular and sustainable collaboration and explore the possibility of developing joint strategies and resource mobilization plans with United Nations sister agencies, civil society, the private sector and international financial institutions (IFIs), in addition to scaling and adapting existing successful partnerships in other regions and/or countries.

Building on pilot experiences, UNDP needs to create mechanisms to channel input and feedback from youth to its work at country level as partners and not just beneficiaries. It should also develop pilot interventions that explore new roles for youth in areas such as research, planning, implementation or even M&E. It needs to include social innovation tailored to reaching disadvantaged youth, using technology that is accessible and sustainable for them. This approach should ensure that the programme is designed to fit the needs of the youth being served and foster youth agency in voicing economic and social issues.

**Recommendation 6. UNDP needs to strengthen its results framework and its monitoring and evaluation practices for adequate tracking of youth economic empowerment results and expenditures.** UNDP needs to better conceptualize what success in youth economic empowerment constitutes and

translate it into a corporate results framework as part of the guidance document that will allow the organization to coherently measure, monitor, report and learn from its contribution to youth economic empowerment. This will be a vehicle to contribute to reporting on the broader agenda of youth empowerment and in particular UNDP commitments within the United Nations youth strategy.

The updated results-based management system should go beyond indicators restricted to the number of participants in activities and focus on results. UNDP should consider conducting detailed baseline surveys of the target population before, during and after programme implementation to be able to examine its impact. Moreover, UNDP should follow up on progress after project completion, especially for key interventions and innovative approaches, to ascertain longer-term economic empowerment of participants, thus building its knowledge on long-term youth economic empowerment results, sustainability and constraints.

Finally, UNDP should take steps to improve the youth marker, building on its own experience with other markers as well as capitalizing on experiences from other United Nations agencies using similar markers.

**Recommendation 7. The renewed UNDP vision on youth economic empowerment should be accompanied by a clearly structured resource mobilization strategy.** UNDP needs to formulate a resource mobilization strategy for youth empowerment or dedicated to youth economic empowerment. It should be framed as a viability plan to cover the means to support the organization's ambitions on youth economic empowerment in a realistic way and to identify diversified sources of funding to adequately and predictably finance the youth economic empowerment portfolio. This exercise should be an opportunity for UNDP to reassess its scope and ambition as well as to engage in a cost-opportunity analysis of its footprint in some areas of youth economic empowerment.

At the same time, given the limitations and unpredictability of donor funding, UNDP should engage in a discussion on the opportunity to leverage existing resources and receive extra regular (core) resources for this area. As youth is recognized as a priority of the organization, UNDP could uphold and demonstrate the institutional commitment to youth with more adequate operating funding from regular resources.



## Chapter 1.

# INTRODUCTION

---

This report presents the results of the evaluation of UNDP support to youth economic empowerment. Defined as the capacity of young women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from inclusive growth and development processes,<sup>1</sup> youth economic empowerment is an area of long-standing engagement for UNDP. This support was crucial to the broader United Nations system-wide engagement in the decade following the International Year of Youth (2010/2011). This is the first comprehensive evaluation to gather and analyse the UNDP contribution to youth economic empowerment, decent work<sup>2</sup> and livelihood creation for youth in programme countries.

## 1.1 YOUTH, LABOUR AND EMPOWERMENT: A GENERATION AT RISK

This section presents the main challenges youth face to achieve economic empowerment, including challenges introduced or intensified by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the widely acknowledged mismatch between what educational systems teach and what labour markets require.

**The world currently has the largest youth population ever.** As of 2019, youth – or women and men between 15 and 24 years old<sup>3,4</sup> – accounted for 1.2 billion (16 percent) of the population globally, with a projected growth to 1.3 billion by 2030.<sup>5</sup> While youth make up a relatively small share of the population in developed countries, in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia youth comprise nearly 20 percent of the total population.<sup>6</sup> Youth population growth challenges the distribution of limited resources but also presents opportunities for demographic dividends, higher productivity and economic growth.<sup>7</sup>

Young people are more economically vulnerable and marginalized than adults. Across countries, a sizeable share of youth are prevented from accessing education and job opportunities due to structural

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

<sup>2</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent employment as “work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment”. Decent work is widely acknowledged as a driver of poverty reduction.

<sup>3</sup> Age classification approved by the United Nations General Assembly. This definition is used by UNDP for all statistical purposes. Programmatically and depending on context, UNDP may extend the age range to 30 or 35 years to ensure that programming remains responsive to the needs of young adults.

<sup>4</sup> There is no consensus on the definition of youth. The United Nations defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 24 years while at the same time defining those under 18 as “children” under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For other international organizations, such as the African Development Bank, the definition is based on the International Conference of Labour Statisticians and extends the category to encompass 15-to-35-year-olds.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019: Volume II: Demographic Profiles.

<sup>6</sup> In other developing regions, the proportion of youth is declining, though it remains sizeable, e.g., Latin America and the Caribbean (17 percent) and Western Asia (17 percent). United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018). World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

<sup>7</sup> “Demographic dividend”, as defined by the United Nations Population Fund, is “the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population’s age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population is larger than the non-working-age share of the population”.

and demographic factors.<sup>8</sup> This has potential rippling effects on their current and future well-being, economic empowerment and livelihood perspectives, reinforcing inequality patterns.

In 2019, youth were around three times more likely to be **unemployed** than adults,<sup>9</sup> with an estimated 13.6 percent of the youth population (67.6 million youth) unemployed globally.<sup>10</sup> The share of unemployed youth further increased to 13.8 percent in 2021.<sup>11</sup> In addition, around 123 million are underemployed or “**working poor**”.<sup>12</sup> Some 30 percent of employed youth in low-income countries are underemployed, compared to 8.9 percent in high-income economies.<sup>13</sup> The jobs they typically do are precarious and/or informal and poorly paid. Such jobs do not deliver a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for families, prospects for personal development and freedom of expression, nor do they offer a stable contract or paid leave. Therefore, they do not constitute “decent work”.

Globally, the number of youth **not in employment, education or training (NEET)** stood at 267 million in 2019 and was estimated to have increased in 2020 to almost 270 million, representing one fifth of the population.<sup>14</sup> Youth with NEET status are neither gaining experience in the labour market, nor receiving an income from work nor enhancing their education and skills. The situation is particularly concerning in least and less developed countries, where 63 and 38 percent of youth do not have adequate secondary education and employment opportunities respectively.<sup>15</sup> The full potential of youth is not being realized, even though many contribute to the economy through unpaid work, which is particularly true for young women.

Globally, **young women** are twice as likely as young men to have NEET status.<sup>16</sup> Gender norms around expected roles in domestic and care work, lack of infrastructure and persistent violence against women are other factors limiting their economic empowerment. Although women record a higher enrolment rate in secondary and higher education than men, the lower value attributed to women’s economic contributions leaves young women with higher rates of unemployment, underemployment and often unpaid family-based work. Limited access to capital and mobility restrictions also prevents them from accessing basic necessities, services and decent work.

Against this background, and with 40 million additional people, mostly youth, entering the workforce every year, sustainable decent job creation is an issue that is high on the global agenda and reflected notably in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth).<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Poor labour market participation is partly the consequence of the demographic transition, which resulted in large numbers of youth entering the labour market at around the same time. Most developing country labour markets have been unable to absorb enough working-age population due to lack of competitive economies and limited private sector development. World Economic Forum. The Global Competitiveness Report 2019 (Geneva: WEF, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020. Technology and the future of jobs, International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. There is considerable regional variation, from under 9 percent in Northern America and sub-Saharan Africa to 30 percent in Northern Africa. Unemployment is more prevalent among young women in most subregions.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, The Challenge. <<https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/about>>, accessed 21 November 2021.

<sup>13</sup> World Youth Report, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, The Challenge.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Population Fund, State of World Population 2020. Against My Will – Defying the Practices that Harm Women and Girls and Undermine Equality, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020. The gender gap is even more pronounced in regions such as Southern Asia and the Arab States, where social and cultural norms prevent women from pursuing education or working outside the home.

<sup>17</sup> There has been no significant improvement since 2005 on target 8.6 (“Proportion of youth aged 15–24 years not in education, employment or training”) and the world is far from achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8.

---

### A generation at risk:

- 30 percent of employed youth in low-income countries are underemployed, compared to 8.9 percent in high-income economies
- 22.1 percent of today's youth are not in employment, education or training
- 12 percent of employed youth live below the international poverty line
- Only 23 percent of countries have gender parity in upper secondary education
- Over half of young workers are engaged in informal employment and at risk of exploitative and hazardous work

Source: ILO, ILOStats, undated; World Youth Report, 2018

---

The disparity in labour market participation between young men and women is considerable across the world (16 percentage points), and particularly concerning in the Arab States region (38 percentage points) where only 8.3 percent of young women are part of the labour force.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, about a quarter of youth live in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence, highly impacting their economic prospects and participation.

Moreover, contrary to high-income countries, young people (hereinafter referred in this report as youth or young people) in developing countries do not have easy access to affordable credit, land and other types of ownership due to age and gender restrictions. The share of youth having access to financial assets and savings ranges from 12 percent in Africa to 50 percent in East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>19</sup> The use of mobile phones or Internet for financial transactions is also limited (22 percent versus 52 percent in high-income countries), particularly in Latin America, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, while rapidly expanding among youth in East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, the education system, especially at tertiary level, has often proved to be disconnected from labour market demands, leading to skills mismatch and fuelling youth unemployment.<sup>21</sup> Weak market relevance of education and skills development systems, lack of awareness of labour market demand as well as misaligned study choices are among the key factors causing skills mismatch and dissatisfaction. Among the over 40,000 young people in 150 countries surveyed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2020, one third reported that the education and training they had received did not match their career aspirations.<sup>22</sup> The expanding supply of higher education graduates has not met with a similar level of increase of entry-level high-skilled jobs, resulting in unemployment and job dissatisfaction among young people. The current forms of vocational training are associated more with automatable jobs which puts these graduates at risk of unemployment in the face of technological advancement.<sup>23</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities within and between countries. While the impact of COVID-19 on youth employment has not yet been fully assessed, one in six youth had to stop working since the onset of the pandemic, and 42 percent of those who have continued working have seen

---

<sup>18</sup> ILO, 'ILOStats', undated; 'World Youth Report, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> World Bank, 'Global Findex', undated.

<sup>21</sup> ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF and World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 'Empowering the workforce of tomorrow: The role of business in tackling the skills mismatch among youth', 2021.

<sup>23</sup> ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020.

their incomes reduced. Working hours also fell by nearly 25 percent.<sup>24</sup> More than 70 percent of youth who combine study and work have been affected by the closing of schools, universities and training centres. The impact of COVID-19 on youth employment has been particularly severe in lower-income countries, where the digital divide did not allow for ample teleworking opportunities due to lack of equipment, reduced access to the Internet and sometimes a lack of space at home. While about half of the world's population is using the Internet, the disparity between developed and developing countries in network coverage, mobile phone ownership and access at home to information and communication technology is stark.<sup>25</sup> According to the International Telecommunication Union, 87 percent of people in developed countries are using the Internet, compared with 44 per cent in developing countries. Worrying gaps in connectivity and Internet access persist in rural areas and are especially serious in least developed countries. Globally, 72 percent of households in urban areas have access to the Internet at home, almost twice as much as in rural areas (38 percent). In least developed countries, about 17 percent of the rural population live in areas with no mobile phone coverage.<sup>26</sup>

Social protection systems and social safety nets are widely acknowledged to play a key role in curbing economic exclusion, be they in the form of unemployment assistance, minimum income benefits, basic health-care coverage or cash transfer programmes. However, they are much less common in developing countries and rarely give specific attention to the needs of youth or target the most excluded.<sup>27</sup> Although few social protection schemes formally exclude youth, most programmes require contributory payments. Because of their age and high participation in informal employment, youth have shorter formal work histories than adults aged 24 and above. Having paid less into contributory schemes, youth tend to benefit less from them than older adults.<sup>28</sup>

## Consequences of youth economic marginalization

Youth unemployment and lack of economic opportunities have significant social repercussions and prevent young people from fully enjoying their rights. Beyond the individual level, they affect prosperity, stability and equality within a society and a country's sustainable development. The economic marginalization of young women and men is hampering confidence in political and economic systems, fuelling youth migration and undermining social cohesion and peace.<sup>29</sup> Young people constitute more than 11 percent of the world's 280 million migrants,<sup>30</sup> who face further risks of exploitation and socioeconomic exclusion.<sup>31</sup>

Limited education, skills development and income opportunities have impacted youth engagement in socioeconomic life and require specific attention in the immediate development response.<sup>32</sup> The pandemic-induced global crisis is exposing youth to "serious challenges to their education, economic

---

<sup>24</sup> ILO et al, (2020). 'Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being. Decent Jobs for Youth. Survey Report 2020'.

<sup>25</sup> International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 'Digital Development Dashboard', undated.

<sup>26</sup> ITU, 'Digital Inclusion of All', <<https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/digital-inclusion-of-all.aspx>> accessed 21 November 2021.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Social Policy and Development. 'Promoting the Inclusion of Young People through Social Protection. Social Development Brief #5, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Izzi, Valeria, 'Promoting Decent Employment for African Youth as a Peacebuilding Strategy. Evidence Synthesis Paper Series 4', 2020.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Population Division, 'International Migrant Stock 2020', <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>> accessed 21 November 2021.

<sup>31</sup> International Organization for Migration, 'Engaging Youth as Key Partners in Migration Governance. Unlocking the Potential of Youth to Respond to the New Challenges and Opportunities of Migration', <<https://www.iom.int/unlocking-potential-youth-respond-new-challenges-and-opportunities-migration>> accessed 21 November 2021.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations, 'A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to COVID-19', April 2020, 'Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19', March 2020.

prospects and mental health” and fuelling a risk of youth disillusionment.<sup>33</sup> Although many countries have taken unprecedented measures to extend social safety nets, this has remained largely insufficient. The global economic recession and the changing economy, both induced by the pandemic, have exacerbated the challenges facing youth in accessing decent livelihoods, appropriate skills and support in the school-to-work transition. Meanwhile, youth are rarely engaged as full partners for an inclusive and sustainable recovery.

Youth unemployment and underemployment are affecting human, economic and social capital, which weakens a sense of belonging and can trigger a cycle of intergenerational poverty, vulnerability and conflict. As the fastest growing demographic, youth are faced with inefficient economies and are bearing the brunt of the imminent effects of climate change on livelihoods. Millions of youth are taking perilous migration routes that are costing them their lives.<sup>34</sup> Youth unemployment and underemployment, especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a sharp increase in mental health issues and suicide among young populations worldwide.<sup>35</sup> Hence, youth economic empowerment is of ultimate urgency, and the costs and risks of not addressing it are too high to ignore.

Young people face multiple forms of exclusion, including barriers to education and employment, poverty and exclusion from global, regional, national and local-level decision-making processes. For instance, the minimum age criteria for being elected as a member of parliament is 25 years in one third of countries globally.<sup>36</sup> At programme or project level, youth are often grouped with children or adults, lacking opportunities or support to meet their specific rights, priorities and needs. This environment of exclusion fuels discrimination and violence.<sup>37</sup> It is against this background that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the critical role of youth as agents of change in achieving sustainable development and peace, and commits to listen to and act on young people’s views, to foster youth participation and empowerment in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## 1.2 THE UNDP APPROACH TO YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

This section describes the UNDP strategic approach to youth economic empowerment and how it is being operationalized in UNDP programmes as part of broader efforts to eradicate poverty. UNDP has long recognized the need to address youth economic empowerment as a lever for poverty alleviation and youth participation in development processes.

The UNDP approach is anchored in its organizational mandate and strategic plans. The last two strategic plans, for 2014–2017 and 2018–2021, implicitly position youth economic empowerment as straddling the UNDP focus areas of poverty reduction and good governance. UNDP expenditure for youth economic empowerment over 2015–2021 is estimated at around \$866 million (corresponding to a yearly average of \$124 million over the evaluation period).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘The Global Risks Report 2021. 16th Edition’, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> UNDP Africa Blog. 2017. “Promise or Peril? Africa’s 830 Million Young People By 2050”, 12 August 2017.

<sup>35</sup> OECD 2021 Policy response to COVID-19, supporting youth mental health, 12 May 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), ‘IPU Parline’, last updated December 31 2020.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, ‘World Youth Report. Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> This amount is an estimate of the UNDP investment in youth economic empowerment at the programmatic level. It corresponds to the expenditure of related projects identified over the period 2015–2021 based on the Power Bi Dashboard, applying the youth beneficiary marker and filtering youth in the project and output description. This was complemented by the UNDP youth project mapping directory from 2015 to 2017, since Power Bi’s project markers only cover projects (and outputs) for 2018 – 2021.

The rationale for UNDP intervention in this area is justified by a lack of decent jobs for youth which has negative consequences at the individual and societal levels, as described above. The goal is to support the creation of productive jobs and provide employment opportunities for labour market entrants. Decent work and livelihood creation, including through economic development, are seen as key determinants in the socioeconomic empowerment of youth by creating a sense of identity and dignity to help better integrate young people into their communities.

The focus on empowerment is based on the understanding that to participate in the labour market (as well as civic processes), young people need to be able to articulate their needs and propose solutions. They need to have the right capabilities – skills, sufficient resources and enabling environments – to thrive. This requires interventions at institutional level, through youth organizations and networks as well as in support of policymakers who can listen to and respond to the voices of youth. There is growing evidence that development policies and programmes that are planned and implemented with the participation of youth have a higher chance of achieving a lasting impact and reducing tensions through the re-allocation of economic status as part of the development process.

The UNDP Executive Group adopted its first global corporate youth strategy, “Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future”, at the end of 2014. Covering the period 2014–2017 to align with the Strategic Plan, the strategy had three outcomes: youth economic empowerment; civic engagement and participation; and resilience-building in crisis settings. More specifically, the first outcome focused on increased economic empowerment, through enhanced quantity and quality of jobs available to youth in productive sectors, with access to social protection schemes.<sup>39</sup> The demand side focused on supporting entrepreneurship and social enterprises, private and public sector youth employment schemes, and public employment schemes that foster economic reintegration of youth in recovery contexts. The supply side included fostering employability and addressing skills mismatch through skills development, internships, volunteer placements and job centres. Support to the enabling environment included support for institutional and policy frameworks and national strategies that favour youth employment, especially young women and vulnerable groups, and promotion of investments in sectors with potential growth for youth employment such as information and communication technology. As a positive force for transformational change, young people were identified not only as beneficiaries but also as collaborators and leaders. The strategy intended to mainstream a human rights-based approach across its outcome areas, focusing on access to quality basic services, freedom of expression and association, participation and inclusivity. Particular attention was paid to gender equality and young women’s empowerment.

---

Young people are three times as likely as adults (25 years and older) to be unemployed. Although this is partly because their limited work experience counts against them when they are applying for entry-level jobs, there are also major structural barriers preventing young people from entering the labour market. UNDP addresses both elements through a three-pronged approach:

- Fostering **demand** for labour through entrepreneurship and employment schemes targeting youth
- Support skills development for youth to increase employability (“**supply**”)
- Work with Governments to create **policy environments** conducive to decent work and livelihood creation for youth

---

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2014). UNDP Youth Strategy 2014–2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future.



In 2018, UNDP opted not to draft a second strategy and instead to align itself with the United Nations system-wide youth strategy “Youth 2030: Working with and for young people”, which UNDP co-authored as part of an inter-agency initiative.<sup>40</sup> The system-wide Youth 2030 strategy is broader in scope, including for example a workstream on quality education and basic services, but “economic empowerment through decent work” is still one of the five focus areas.

In addition, regional UNDP strategic offers feature strategic guidance on youth economic empowerment. Work on youth economic empowerment in Africa is guided by the UNDP renewed strategic offer for Africa (2020),<sup>41</sup> which identifies youth and women’s employment and empowerment as one of its six impact areas and serves as a continent-wide and umbrella strategy to advance youth empowerment. In Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a road map on youth economic empowerment aims to offer holistic solutions for inclusive employment, including for youth.

## Global programmatic level

UNDP engagement in youth economic empowerment at the global level is framed within the Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (Youth-GPS, 2016-2020, extended to 2021). It is the first UNDP global programmatic offer for youth empowerment, operated out of the UNDP Global Youth Team in the governance team in response to the youth strategy, the 2030 Agenda and United Nations Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security.<sup>42</sup> The Youth-GPS theory of change considers that an enabling environment, enhanced capacities and support would allow empowered youth to take advantage of opportunities for their development, and to act effectively as citizens, leaders, innovators and agents of change in their communities. The Youth-GPS first and foremost aimed to provide technical and policy support on youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace, in addition to financially supporting catalytic and strategic country-level interventions and ensuring coordination with regional and country offices. “Increased economic empowerment of youth” is also covered by the Youth-GPS as one of three thematic priority areas.<sup>43</sup>

## Regional programmatic level

UNDP implements a range of regional youth economic empowerment initiatives through its regional bureaux, providing advisory services to country offices based on global applied research and lessons learned. The first regional youth economic empowerment initiative is the Youth Connekt programme<sup>44</sup> in Africa, which started in Rwanda in 2012 and has since expanded to 25 African countries. It was followed in 2019 by a flagship partnership with the Tony Elumelu Foundation and the subregional Youth Empowerment Programme for the Sahel which was rolled out in 2021. In Asia and the Pacific, Youth Co: Lab was co-created in 2017 as a public-private partnership to empower youth to accelerate

---

<sup>40</sup> The strategy is implemented under the guidance of a High-Level Steering Committee composed of the co-chairs (the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)); a select number of biennially rotating United Nations entities; and rotating representatives of a global youth-led platform/organizations. The Steering Committee is supported by a Joint Working Group, where UNDP has been represented since the beginning.

<sup>41</sup> UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, ‘Africa’s Promise: The UNDP Renewed Strategic Offer in Africa’, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Before the Youth-GPS was approved, UNDP efforts for youth empowerment remained mostly at project level. According to the programme document, in 2012-2015, UNDP had carried out around 550 projects in 120 countries across the three priority areas.

<sup>43</sup> The other two focus areas are “civic engagement and participation in decision-making and political processes and institutions” and “strengthened youth engagement in resilience and peacebuilding”. In the revised project document, the initiative extends its focus on the role of youth in climate action.

<sup>44</sup> Youth Connekt is a multi-stakeholder partnership which includes the African Union, the African Development Bank, the Government of Rwanda, United Nations entities, bilateral partners, non-governmental organizations, foundations and the private sector.

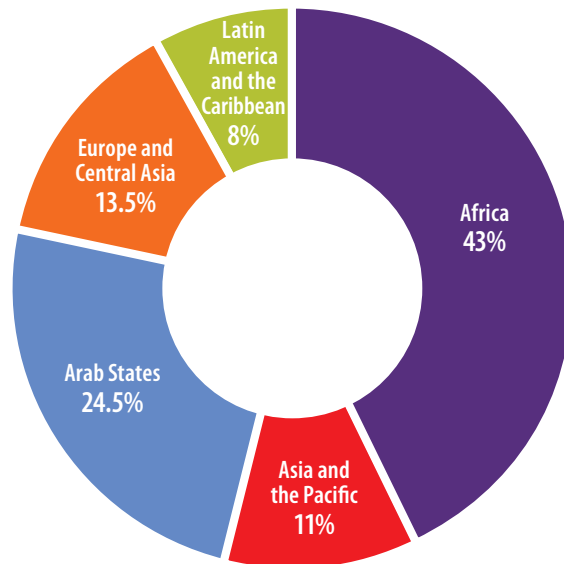
the implementation of the SDGs through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship. Other regional programmes that focus on innovation and entrepreneurship include the Youth Leadership Programme, initiated in 2015 and operating in 15 countries in the Arab States region, and developing inclusive labour markets (Europe and the CIS).

### Country programmatic level

About one in three initiatives within the UNDP youth portfolio relate to youth economic empowerment.<sup>45</sup> For 2021 alone, the youth marker revealed 1,585 projects implemented by 130 country offices and distributed among regions, although with a higher concentration in Africa. However, after filtering the projects by outputs explicitly benefiting youth, the number narrows from 1,578 to 179 in 70 countries and further downward to 127 projects in 45 offices when looking at outputs contributing to youth economic empowerment.

Over the evaluation period (2015-2021), UNDP implemented 201 projects in support of youth economic empowerment.<sup>46</sup> The largest number of projects was found in the Africa region (see figure 1), but the highest expenditure was recorded in the Arab States region, due partially to some large individual projects in the region.<sup>47</sup> The Latin American and Caribbean region implemented the fewest projects and had the smallest expenditure of the five regions.

**FIGURE 1.** Percentage of youth economic empowerment projects implemented over the period 2015-2021, by region



Source: UNDP Power Bi, accessed 2021

<sup>45</sup> The remainder aim to encourage civic and political participation, and a few projects specifically target youth in conflict settings through peacebuilding/resilience-building interventions. UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, "Youth project mapping directory" (Accessed 2021).

<sup>46</sup> Of these, 23 percent started prior to 2015 and 57 percent were still ongoing in 2021. Most (43 percent) have an implementation period of three to five years.

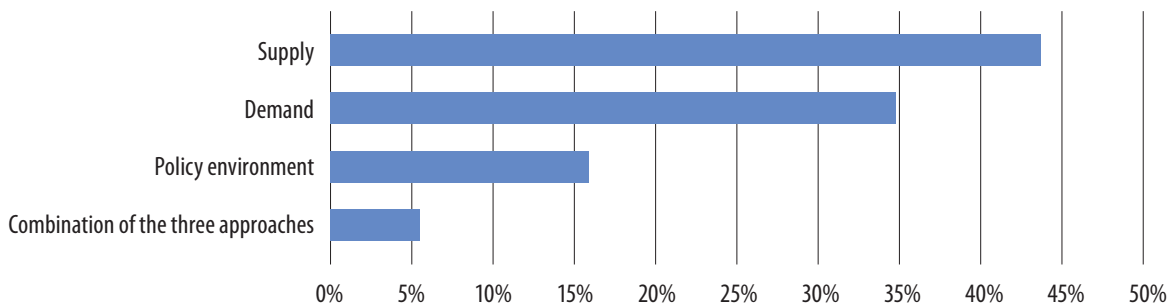
<sup>47</sup> The Supporting Lebanese Hosting Communities project and the Yemen Crisis Response Project II collectively account for over half (57 percent) of the region's expenditure in projects contributing to youth economic empowerment (\$560 million) over the evaluation period.



Most of the youth economic empowerment projects over the evaluation period (2015-2021) focused on “supply” side interventions, specifically skills for employability and, to a lesser extent, employment and self-employment (“demand”)<sup>48</sup>. Engagement at the policy level has been more limited (figure 2).

As part of its COVID-19 crisis response (COVID-19 offer 2.0),<sup>49</sup> UNDP identified and prioritized four areas of support to countries for the next 12 to 18 months, among which social protection and the green economy – both intimately tied to youth economic empowerment. At the country level, UNDP worked with United Nations country teams (UNCTs) to conduct the socioeconomic impact assessments and design and implement socioeconomic response plans. Around 100 country offices reported youth-related activities in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the majority of which support youth employment, entrepreneurship and livelihood enhancement.

**FIGURE 2.** Thematic overview of youth economic empowerment projects (%)



Source: UNDP Power Bi, accessed 2021

<sup>48</sup> Classification of projects was done by IEO based on project documents and description of interventions on transparency.

<sup>49</sup> UNDP, 'Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030', June 2020.

## Chapter 2.

# EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

---

This chapter sets out the evaluation’s purpose and scope, lists key evaluation questions and describes the evaluation methodology, including data collection and analysis methods. It concludes by discussing some limitations affecting the evaluation process and findings.

## 2.1 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND UTILITY OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation aims to provide UNDP management, members of the Executive Board, programme countries and other stakeholders with an assessment of the results of UNDP support to youth economic empowerment and suggests avenues for improvement. It has a twofold accountability and learning objective: first, to assess results of past UNDP work against its goals as stated in strategic and programmatic documents; and second, to shape organizational learning and inform the strategic direction of UNDP work on youth economic empowerment in the next Strategic Plan period (2022-2025).

The evaluation assesses UNDP support to youth economic empowerment at global, regional and country levels, covering the period 2015 to mid-2021. It considers how the needs of youth as a key UNDP constituency have been integrated into strategies and management tools, and with what effects. Dedicated projects and initiatives to promote youth economic empowerment through skills development, job opportunities, access to finance and policy engagement were analysed as part of overall UNDP support to keep people out of poverty and promote social cohesion. Specific attention was paid to UNDP support to youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the UNDP offer 2.0, and to efforts to leave no one behind, including young women and other marginalized groups. Partnerships and collaborations to promote more integrated change, both within the United Nations system and with other actors, have been considered.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations generated by the evaluation are expected to be used to influence strategic direction, to inform theory and practice of youth economic empowerment interventions and to build partnerships. It is expected to inform UNDP positioning vis-à-vis Youth 2030, the United Nations system-wide youth strategy, and relevant SDGs, the operationalization of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, the planning and implementation of country programmes and the work of partners in this area. The evaluation will be presented to the UNDP Executive Board at its first regular session of 2022.

## 2.2 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK, APPROACH AND QUESTIONS

The evaluation is framed around a modified version of the theory of change developed for the UNDP Youth-GPS, 2016-2020 (see annex 1). This integrates theoretical constructs from Zimmerman’s model of youth empowerment<sup>50</sup> and social cognitive career theory<sup>51</sup> as well as language adapted from the SDGs.

---

<sup>50</sup> Zimmerman, Marc A., ‘Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational, and community levels of analysis’, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Lent, Robert W., Steven D. Brown and Gail Hackett, ‘Social Cognitive Career Theory’, 1994 (and following revisions).

The evaluation assesses the extent to which the three-pronged approach of UNDP has contributed to enhancing youth psychological, behavioural and economic empowerment, and created an enabling environment for poverty reduction and livelihood improvement. It considers the influence of contextual factors on programme and project interventions, as defined in the evaluation’s theory of change (see annex 1).

The evaluation answers the following questions:<sup>52</sup>

<b>Relevance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent have UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions responded to the most pressing youth challenges?</li> <li>• How has UNDP support evolved with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to address youth’s emerging needs?</li> </ul>
<b>Coherence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, and with what results, have UNDP strategies and programmatic direction coherently promoted a whole-of-system engagement for youth economic empowerment at regional and country levels?</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness and sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective has UNDP work been in contributing to youth economic empowerment?</li> <li>• To what extent have the results achieved with UNDP support continued promoting behavioural change and sustainable employment after the end of programmes?</li> <li>• What factors contributed to, or hindered, the success and sustainability of UNDP contributions to youth economic empowerment in all its dimensions?</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusiveness and innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, and with what results, have UNDP interventions promoted the engagement of marginalized and vulnerable youth?</li> <li>• To what extent has UNDP used innovative approaches in addressing youth needs and challenges?</li> </ul>

Each evaluation criterion, with its corresponding questions and subquestions, is represented in the evaluation matrix for this exercise (provided in annex 2).<sup>53</sup> The matrix, showing all corresponding data sources, data collection methods, data analysis methods and potential indicators, was the key tool for organizing data collection and shaping data triangulation, analysis and reporting.

## 2.3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation takes a mixed-methods approach inspired by contribution analysis;<sup>54</sup> therefore, it does not seek to prove conclusively whether, or how far, a development intervention has contributed to a change or set of changes. Instead, it aims to produce a plausible, evidence-based narrative to help explain how and why changes occurred. Data were collected and analysed through an

<sup>52</sup> Annex 2 presents the full set of evaluative questions.

<sup>53</sup> The evaluation was framed by the evaluation questions in combination with four of the standard evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, namely relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability. Efficiency and the long-term effects or impact of youth economic empowerment were not assessed due to data scarcity.

<sup>54</sup> Mayne, John, ‘Contribution Analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect. Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) methodological brief’, 2008.

iterative process and triangulated across sources and methods. The evaluation included an innovative multi-stakeholder consultation process.<sup>55</sup> Protocols were developed for each data collection method to ensure rigour and suitability to the audience, especially when consulting with youth (see annex 3 and annex 9).

The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020) and underwent detailed ethical review (see annex 3). Ethical approval for the proposed methodology was granted by an external ethical review board prior to fieldwork involving youth. The ethical protocol included, among others, a verbal informed consent provision for all key informants, written consent for “SenseMaking” and survey participants, and a protection protocol for data and human subjects (annex 10). All evaluators engaged in the projects signed the UNEG [Pledge of Commitment to Ethical Conduct in Evaluation](#). The obligations of individual evaluators included integrity, respect, accountability and beneficence.

## Data collection

The evaluation collected data through five main channels:

- 1. Analytics of corporate data, including “web scraping” of social media.** Data were extracted from the UNDP result-based management system and its financial reporting system.<sup>56</sup> A sample of planning and monitoring reports of projects that are exclusively/partially focused on youth economic empowerment (see annex 11 for the list of sampled projects and selection criteria) for more in-depth analysis, and information available on UNDP social media and knowledge platforms, were extracted and judged against the analytical framework based on the evaluation questions. A moderated online consultation was held on SparkBlue<sup>57</sup> from 20 May to 11 June 2021 on “youth skills development for employment”; see annex 4.
- 2. Comprehensive document review.** The evaluation reviewed documentary evidence pertaining to youth economic empowerment interventions at country, regional and global levels. These secondary data informed interviews and focus group guides and survey questionnaires, as well as triangulation for evaluation findings. Sources are listed in annex 5.
- 3. Key informant interviews.** Remote semi-structured interviews were conducted on a range of topics, including implementation of youth economic empowerment efforts and their results, effects and relevance in various contexts. Interviews collected feedback at country, regional and global levels from: (a) UNDP officers, including youth programme officers and focal points and selected governance and poverty reduction/sustainable development programme officers; (b) implementing partners, including national Governments and civil society; (c) peers, including representatives of other United Nations agencies, bilateral and international development partners; and (d) other partners including private sector and civil society organizations with which UNDP has worked,

---

<sup>55</sup> Key stakeholders of this evaluation were engaged in three ways: (i) senior officer focal points were appointed by the UNDP Administrator to support the evaluation and answer technical queries; (ii) an external advisory panel weighed in at key stages of the evaluation process to provide state-of-the-art benchmarking with academia and comparator organizations and facilitate access to literature and expertise on youth economic empowerment; and (iii) the UNDP youth advisory panel commented on emerging findings and recommendations, making sure these would ultimately improve young people’s lives and livelihoods.

<sup>56</sup> Integrated results and resources framework (IRRF) reports, portfolio analysis dashboard and financial information from the Atlas planning system, along with various programmatic markers UNDP routinely collects (gender marker, disability marker, leaving no one behind marker, innovation marker).

<sup>57</sup> An online community engagement platform for UNDP.

advisory group members and international specialists. The evaluators interviewed more than 220 stakeholders. See annex 6 for a sample interview guide and interviewee numbers by category.

4. **Participatory narrative survey** (SenseMaker) with programme beneficiaries. Narrative stories were collected to obtain information and insights on change processes facilitated by UNDP-sponsored programmes, and the context in which these stories took place. Youth themselves were involved in interpreting and analysing the stories individually through a specific section of the survey questionnaire, and collectively through facilitated group discussions. (See annex 8 for the questionnaire.) The survey component included six real-time workshops complemented by analogous surveys filled by respondents in their own time. Overall, 598 youth beneficiaries (198 female) of seven UNDP programmes (four interventions at the country level and three regional-level) participated in the survey. Basic statistics on participants can be found in annex 9 and protection protocols in annex 10.<sup>58</sup> While most workshops used the SenseMaker online tool remotely via Zoom, some had to be conducted through in-person, socially distanced workshops with access to computers (Guatemala) or without (Pakistan). Where response rates were low, focus group discussions and individual interviews with beneficiaries supplemented the participatory narrative survey data.
5. **A survey with youth organizations.** A self-completion questionnaire modelled on the *Youth Experience Survey*<sup>59</sup> containing 14 closed and three open-ended questions was administered to youth organizations<sup>60</sup> to gauge their views on the relevance of UNDP work, feedback on effectiveness and sustainability of the interventions (see annex 13). These included both current and former partners of UNDP as well as advocacy organizations entirely external to UNDP.

## Sampling

On the basis of the project list and 2018 stocktaking provided by the UNDP programme team, a purposive sample of initiatives was drawn up. In-depth examination of a number of projects at the country level enabled the evaluation to bring detailed evidence to bear on the question of UNDP strategies and programme performance in supporting youth economic empowerment. The selection criteria used to select a draft sample of country-level projects is provided in annex 11. Twelve countries and three regional-level projects were selected, ensuring a geographical balance across regions (see figure 3).

The participatory narrative survey (SenseMaker) specifically targeted youth who are currently benefiting or who benefited in the past from UNDP-supported services. Participants were recruited by the evaluation team directly, on the basis of beneficiary lists provided by UNDP country offices. Evaluators reached out to the entirety of past beneficiaries of UNDP-sponsored youth economic empowerment initiatives. Thus, all past beneficiaries had an equal chance of being selected, as long as their contact information was available.

---

<sup>58</sup> This number was reduced to 339 to avoid skewing the analysis due to the higher number of beneficiaries from one single project.

<sup>59</sup> [http://youthdev.illinois.edu/?page\\_id=189](http://youthdev.illinois.edu/?page_id=189)

<sup>60</sup> The survey was dispatched to 402 youth organizations and received a response rate of 28 percent. It is noted that some of the respondents may have forwarded the survey to other agencies working on youth, so the actual response rate could be lower.

**FIGURE 3. Mapping of the countries with projects sampled for more in-depth analysis**



Note: List of countries with number of projects sampled for more in-depth analysis: Albania (2 projects); Cambodia (2 projects); Chile (3 projects); Ecuador (1 project); Guatemala (1 project); Lebanon (2 projects); Mali (1 project); Pakistan (2 projects); Rwanda (2 projects); Senegal (1 project); Somalia (2 projects); Tajikistan (2 projects); United Republic of Tanzania (2 projects). The sample also includes 3 projects at the regional level. See annex 11 for a detailed list of sampled projects.

This map does not reflect a position by UNDP or the Independent Evaluation Office on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## Data analysis

The evaluation used a mix of data analysis methods:

- Correlation analysis of the UNDP youth economic empowerment portfolio as a component of UNDP programming vis-à-vis relevant country-level statistics and population data
- Meta-synthesis of evidence from past UNDP evaluations over the period 2015-2021 (10 independent thematic evaluations, 83 independent country programme evaluations and annual development results, 38 decentralized evaluations in the area of youth economic empowerment) in addition to the 2021 Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) *Reflections* paper on UNDP support to youth skills development for employment<sup>61</sup>
- Descriptive and multivariate statistical analysis of survey data from youth organizations to identify and interpret patterns and establish cross-country and cross-regional comparisons
- Content analysis and descriptive statistical analyses of data from corporate databases (expenditures/results reporting, etc.) and from UNDP and external documents
- Content and discourse analysis of key informant interview data

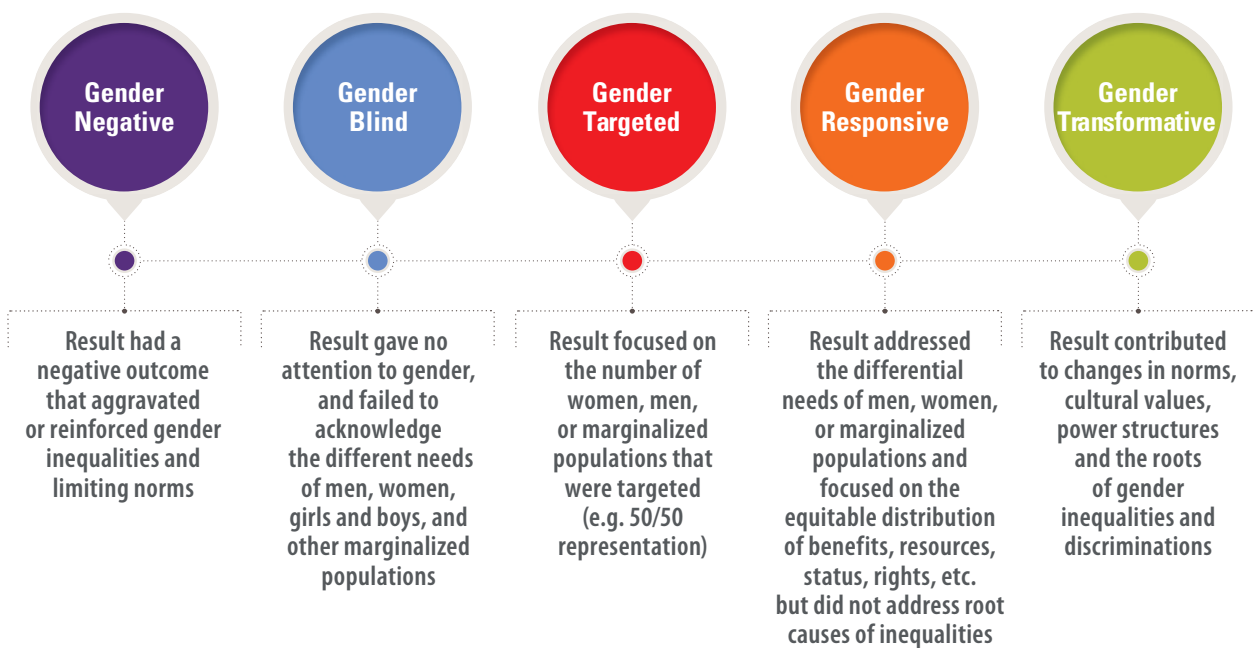
<sup>61</sup> UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, *Reflections* series. Lessons from evaluations: UNDP support to youth skills development for employment (2021).

- Most significant change analysis of participatory narrative survey data to understand to what extent perceived psychological and behavioural change was facilitated by UNDP interventions, and to identify factors affecting the UNDP performance; dedicated SenseMaker© software was used to produce quantitative data, uncover relationships and patterns embedded in youth stories and identify typical and atypical stories, which were interpreted jointly with project stakeholders
- Theory-based analysis of actual versus intended results and influencing factors
- Analysis of performance against the OECD/DAC criteria

To analyse the level of gender-related approaches and results, the IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale was employed (see figure 4). Gender marker data were used for analysis of gender programme expenditures against commitments made, and sex-disaggregated data were assessed where available.

Informed by a systems approach, evidence was contrasted and patterns synthesized into key findings to report on the key evaluation questions, framed around a triangulation matrix (see annex 12). Higher-level conclusions and forward-looking recommendations were derived from this analysis.

**FIGURE 4. IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale**



Source: Adapted from the Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, IEO, UNDP, 2015

## 2.4 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

**COVID-19 and remote work.** This evaluation was conducted under the challenging circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that the evaluation team was unable to travel and therefore collected and analysed data remotely. Another implication of the pandemic was that SenseMaking, usually carried out as an in-person workshop, had to take place remotely via Zoom or other means, which excluded some potential participants due to low literacy skills and lack of connectivity.



While these extraordinary circumstances presented some limitations, the evaluation was still able to respect evaluation norms and professional standards.

**Data scarcity.** The main challenge to the exercise was the paucity of monitoring data (poor age/sex disaggregation, little information on quality of services, etc.), along with the unavailability of some key project documents, periodic reports and in some case the absence of beneficiary lists. The availability of documentation varied across different interventions, making it difficult to identify the results UNDP attributes to its youth economic empowerment projects. To mitigate these challenges, and for triangulation purposes, the evaluation team broadened the scope of its secondary data review by including external assessments and evaluations to cross-reference internally available data and validate findings. It also used additional data collection tools such as the SenseMaker and a youth organization survey as a mitigation strategy for data paucity.

**Low evaluability.** The youth economic empowerment evaluability was moderate to low, namely because monitoring data on results at intermediate steps of the results chain was lacking, as were impact-level data. More importantly, a clear theory of change for youth economic empowerment and a corporate results framework to frame the evaluation were absent. The evaluation worked with the best available data but recognizes quality and coverage issues. To try to address this limitation, the evaluation team reconstructed a theory of change and recruited five seasoned evaluators who are specialists in youth economic empowerment. The team also relied on the support and guidance of an advisory panel composed of recognized specialist practitioners and academics on youth economic empowerment.<sup>62</sup>

**Mapping of youth economic empowerment interventions.** The evaluation faced challenges in identifying and mapping UNDP work on youth economic empowerment. The use of the UNDP Transparency Portal and youth marker in the UNDP Atlas software (c.f. finding on monitoring and evaluation) did not yield a full list of projects promoting youth economic empowerment which could have been used as a sampling frame. Countries and projects sampled are indicative of the extent of youth economic empowerment work across UNDP programming in 135 countries. To assess programme performance on the ground, the evaluation drew a purposive criterion-based sample of UNDP-supported initiatives taking into consideration regional distribution, type of youth economic empowerment intervention, signature solution, gender marker and country characteristics, among others. This approach allowed for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest while being cost- and time-effective. Purposive sampling allowed the evaluation to identify key patterns and emerging trends and draw valid conclusions, while not claiming representativeness in statistical terms (non-probability sample).

**Compressed time frame.** Time constraints limited the extent of data collection and analysis. Notably, the SenseMaker exercises in Somalia and Tajikistan had to be dropped due to limited time to arrange interpretation services. Data collection was conducted over a short period of six weeks in June/July 2021 which coincided with summer holidays for some key informants who were therefore not available for interviewing.

---

<sup>62</sup> The advisory panel provided support for the review of the terms of reference and the evaluation theory of change, the development of the signification framework for the SenseMaker as well as for the review of the final evaluation report.



## Chapter 3.

# ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDP CONTRIBUTION TO YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

---

This section examines the relevance of the UNDP programmatic approach and the effectiveness and sustainability of results achieved.

## 3.1 PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH

**Finding 1. Relevance of UNDP interventions in responding to the most pressing youth economic empowerment challenges.** UNDP has been highly aware of young people’s most pressing challenges. However, its response fell short of fully addressing access to decent jobs and productive employment. UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions were skewed towards supply over demand and paid less attention to most structural challenges.

UNDP staff and stakeholders interviewed as well as the SparkBlue discussion summed up the monumental and varied economic challenges facing youth as the tension between supply (mismatch between education and employability skills), demand (low job vacancies due to inefficient or sluggish markets, weak private and public sector engagement due to instability), and the policy environment (weak/unresponsive Governments, inexistent/adverse youth policies, lack of social protection and labour rights frameworks). The correlation analysis<sup>63</sup> does not demonstrate a strong relationship between countries with acute youth economic challenges and UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions (see figure 5).<sup>64</sup> The desk review of key documents indicates that the design of the UNDP response was mostly addressing partial elements of these challenges. In several contexts, the design of operations was largely limited by restrictive or unfavourable policy environments. Initiatives did not culminate into a synergetic and holistic strategy for full economic empowerment, decent jobs and productive employment.

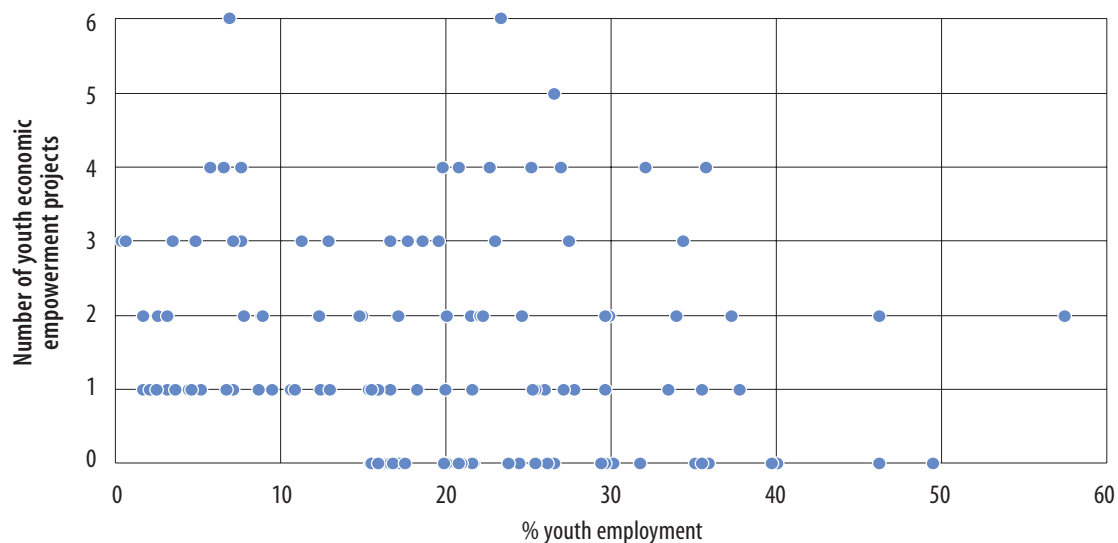
Overall, the UNDP response overemphasized the supply side of employment creation (see figure 2 in chapter 1). Most interventions focused on young people’s low employability skills, rather than the structural factors underlying the skills gap. In many cases, the rationale for design acknowledged the mismatch between job market needs and outdated education systems that do not foster employability and entrepreneurship skills resulting in, for example, 38 percent of Rwandan youths

---

<sup>63</sup> This analysis provides indicative information regarding UNDP targeting and should not be interpreted without the proper regional and country contexts. Moreover, it should be considered within its statistical limitations (reliability of national statistics, data gaps, etc.).

<sup>64</sup> Of the countries implementing youth economic empowerment projects – and for which country context data are available (87 out of 95 countries) – 52 percent and 60 percent have above global average youth unemployment and proportion of youth NEET, respectively.

**FIGURE 5.** Correlation between number of youth economic empowerment projects implemented by country offices and depth of youth unemployment at the country level



Sources: UNDP Power Bi Dashboard, World Bank World Development Indicators, accessed 2021

aged 20–24 not engaged in employment, education or training,<sup>65</sup> 40 percent of Chilean employers struggling to recruit qualified candidates<sup>66</sup> and widespread negative social norms towards technical and vocational education training recorded in the Arab States region and Senegal. However, the vast majority of the UNDP response on skills for employability concentrated on vocational training and did not go further to address the social determinants for the skills gap and the structural challenges, such as defective education systems or social norms.

The support for initiatives to address demand favoured entrepreneurship over structural job creation. Rigid market structures that hinder job creation and low access to resources are among the most persistent challenges to youth economic empowerment across all regions. In contrast, few interventions were designed to strengthen youth public employment schemes or build linkages with the private and public sectors with the specific purpose to promote job creation.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the UNDP response focused on promoting entrepreneurship mostly through training programmes and in some cases, financial support to participants and facilitation of networking through organizing youth summits. Fostering entrepreneurship for job creation is based on the assumption that these youth enterprises will be successful and will generate local jobs. While young entrepreneurs can play an important role in generating employment for youth and act as agents of change in their countries and communities, favouring entrepreneurship over structural job creation may be problematic in certain contexts. First, they burden youth with the responsibility of job creation instead of holding national Governments and the private sector to account to fulfil their obligations for the right of

<sup>65</sup> International Labour Organization, 'Youth Country Brief. Rwanda: Youth Labour Markets and the School-to-Work Transition', November 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Staffingamericalatina, 'Chile: The importance of pertinence in young people's professional training. Seminar Youth Talent and Perspectives on the Future of Work', 17 Oct 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Youth Co: Lab.

youth to decent jobs<sup>68</sup> and productive employment. Secondly, only a fraction of small enterprises are created and survival rates are low. They are often micro-enterprises composed of one single person, thus making a limited contribution to overall job creation. Hence focusing on entrepreneurship is not always a reliable strategy for structural job creation, especially as young entrepreneurs face unfavourable market dynamics such as weak infrastructure, underdeveloped value chains, multiple political and environmental shocks and instability.

Urgent attention to structural job creation is required as some contexts are experiencing atypical economic dynamics that will strongly impact youth. In the last decade, Africa's economic growth did not stimulate job creation, pointing to structural shifts and concentration of wealth among the growing middle class and a lesser trickle-down effect on broader segments of the population. Nonetheless, this growth was coupled with a push for education across Africa which resulted in reduction of the labour force. The increasing rate of education is not keeping pace with job availability, quality and preference.

Despite the growing focus of UNDP on supporting social protection mechanisms, few direct links were drawn to the specific challenges facing youth in relation to informal employment and the enabling environment. The majority of youth on the planet are trapped in an unfavourable policy environment, characterized by informal employment and lack of social protection, with the highest rates of informal employment exceeding 80 percent across the Arab States region<sup>69</sup> and Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, close to 9 in 10 young workers are in informal employment.<sup>70</sup> The informal economy includes both employment and self-employment and is subject to lack of social protection in terms of health insurance, pension schemes, work-related injuries and decent work conditions. Youth vulnerability incurred by informal work has rocketed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though informality is the most pervasive challenge to youth economic empowerment, related interventions counted only as a fraction of the response<sup>71</sup>. For instance, out of a geographically balanced sample of 61 socioeconomic responses plans to the COVID-19 pandemic, 49 discussed social protection. Such plans in the Asia-Pacific and Europe and the CIS regions paid more attention to social protection (20 percent), while fewer did in Latin America and the Caribbean (10 percent on social protection), Africa (15 percent) and the Arab States region (16 percent). Of the 49 that discussed social protection, only 15 explicitly link youth with social protection either in their situational analysis or response while 11 plans specifically aim at building back more inclusive social protection systems to address the needs of young people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, if social protection programmes do not have specific provision for youth, the benefits often elude them.<sup>72</sup> In fragile contexts, interventions sought to strengthen youth economic resilience. Temporary safety nets against shocks were provided through short-term intensive employment, such as in Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Yemen, and through the rehabilitation of safe spaces for youth to run youth economic empowerment-related activities, as in Mali and Somalia.

---

<sup>68</sup> The "right to decent work" is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has provisions dealing not only with "the right to work" but with the various aspects of decent work, including just and favourable conditions of work, protection against unemployment, equal pay and others.

<sup>69</sup> International Labour Organization et al, Youth Employment in the Middle East and North Africa. Background paper for Translating Research into Scaled Up Action: Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth in MENA, 21-22 November 2017, Amman, Jordan.

<sup>70</sup> UNDP (2021). Informality and Social Protection in African Countries: A Forward-looking Assessment of Contributory Schemes.

<sup>71</sup> For example, the project, Supporting the Emergence of Productive Families and the Integration of Youth for Sustainable Economic Growth (PAEFP/IJ) in Senegal; and the project, Expanding the Social Protection System for Young Men and Women in the Informal Economy in Ecuador. In Tajikistan, training was provided to support business registration, but it was reported that companies do not have incentives to register their businesses.

<sup>72</sup> UNDP, 'Informality and Social Protection in African Countries: A Forward-looking Assessment', 2021.

The design of UNDP responses increasingly adopted an evidence-based approach that has yet to be systematically optimized. Many interventions drew on existing studies on youth economic conditions, needs and issues and some commissioned specific research or assessments as part of their inception phase. While these “front-end” assessments reinforced the rationale and logical framework of the interventions, not all were completed and a good number ended up not being used. Furthermore, desk reviews of programme documents and interviews indicate that lessons were not systematically incorporated in the rationale and design of the intervention.

Finally, while there is no internationally accepted definition of youth,<sup>73</sup> UNDP has adopted a broad definition of youth (age range of 15–35 years) in its intervention as a way to adapt its programmes to different contexts. Based on the results of the SenseMaker, it appears that this approach has created an unbalance that favoured the 25–35 age range over the 15–24 age range. Around 60 percent of project beneficiaries participating in the SenseMaker are in the age range of 25–35 years. Most importantly, they are the ones reporting higher levels of benefits from the interventions. This raises the question of the primary target in UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions, and the implication it has for the design of those interventions to be responsive to the needs of younger youth.

**Finding 2. Targeting most vulnerable and marginalized youth groups in UNDP interventions.** UNDP has made resolute efforts to integrate and mainstream the principles of leaving no one behind across regions into its youth economic empowerment portfolio. Through these interventions, UNDP has reached multiple types of youth at risk and other vulnerable and marginalized youth groups, in particular youth living in rural areas.

UNDP has integrated the principle of leaving no one behind at strategic and programmatic levels across regions.<sup>74</sup> UNDP reached out to marginalized young people and ensured that they are the primary target of employment and livelihoods programmes. All project documents reviewed included a situational analysis of the country context to enhance the responsiveness of the project design to realities on the ground. The UNDP and United Nations youth strategies recognize that youth are not a homogeneous constituency. Their opportunities, needs and challenges vary significantly between and among youth groups, thus requiring a differentiated approach. The reviewed interventions primarily targeted vulnerable and marginalized youth in precarious employment or unemployment in economically deprived and sometimes conflict-affected contexts. They also addressed various types of vulnerabilities among youth, for example, youth at risk, youth in rural areas, young persons with disabilities, etc. In some cases, UNDP has also adapted its ongoing programming to further integrate the principle of leaving no one behind.<sup>75</sup>

UNDP has substantially targeted youth at risk through many of its interventions across regions. In Somalia, the vulnerable youth categories included internally displaced persons, youth at risk of

---

<sup>73</sup> There is no consensus on the definition of youth. The United Nations defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 24 years while at the same time defining those under-18 as “children” under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For other international organizations, such as the African Development Bank, the definition is based on the International Conference of Labour Statisticians and extends the category to encompass 15-to-35-year-olds.

<sup>74</sup> Based on information collected in the 12 sampled countries and the meta-synthesis.

<sup>75</sup> The earlier phase of the Lebanon host communities support programme (LHSP) 2015-2017 only targeted Lebanese community members and excluded Syrian refugee residents from income-generation activities. The LHSP benefited from lessons learned from past programme evaluations and reversed this imbalance in 2019-2022 to include income-generation activities for vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees, in addition to youth-specific components. Another example is the Youth Leadership Programme (YLP). The programme design and content required participants to have a high level of education, digital access and proficiency and multilingual skills. Given the current context in Lebanon, the relevance of the programme to the most pressing needs of vulnerable youth was questioned. The model is currently being adapted to reach more vulnerable youth by switching to more accessible and youth-friendly language (both in terms of switching most resources to Arabic and using less complex language), increasing the visibility and simplifying the application process.

militarization, former combatants and ex-offenders. This was also the case in Cameroon and Yemen, where UNDP supported prevention activities to address the issue of the recruitment of youth by violent extremist groups, through the support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and income-generating activities.<sup>76</sup> In Colombia, UNDP worked with the Government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the United Nations Verification Mission to support socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants. In other conflict-affected contexts, such as the Arab States region, the drivers for youth militarization were addressed through broader youth economic empowerment interventions linking peacebuilding and civic engagement to short-term livelihood support and long-term employment opportunities.

UNDP also supported youth affected by armed conflict. For instance, the project “Support for human security in northern Mali to strengthen the resilience of youth and women” specifically targeted vulnerable youth between ages 18 and 35 who have partially or fully lost their livelihoods due to the conflict in northern Mali. Similarly, UNDP Colombia<sup>77</sup> sought to support rural youth populations affected by armed conflict and with high poverty indices. In various countries, UNDP provided its support to youth exposed to insecurity and violent conflicts. For example, in Guatemala UNDP has formed a strong partnership with municipalities in marginal neighbourhoods to provide training and employment services to thousands of vulnerable young people.

Despite many urban-centred interventions, some UNDP interventions also catered to hard-to-reach youth in rural areas with the required support services, including those related to youth economic empowerment. Among various examples<sup>78</sup> including from Lebanon, Tajikistan and Yemen, UNDP Georgia applied a more integrated rural development approach to address multidimensional vulnerabilities of rural young people. At the policy level, UNDP Georgia supported the promotion of user-centred, inclusive and sustainable rural development policies and plans. At the same time, the country office promoted employment opportunities for the most vulnerable, supporting SMEs and cooperatives and vocational training in agriculture. While the pandemic allowed most interventions and trainings to be conducted online, it also highlighted the challenges of lacking access to technology, digital devices and the Internet for some of those beneficiaries and the need to further focus on digitally excluded youth groups. To some extent, UNDP Morocco addressed this issue among vulnerable youth and started a fundraising campaign to secure laptops and tablets. In Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, which have two of the lowest Internet coverage rates<sup>79</sup> in Central Asia, particularly in rural areas, the country offices allocated additional resources to engage telecommunication companies to expand the coverage of Internet connectivity to improve access for target youth groups.

The work with young persons with disabilities in youth economic empowerment is less visible.<sup>80</sup> A reduced number of projects focused on young persons with disabilities. While many project documents stated them as part of their target groups, only a small number specific activities and outputs targeted them.<sup>81</sup> One example is UNDP Rwanda, which focused on the needs of youth, especially those living with

---

<sup>76</sup> The Complete Reincorporation into Productive Contexts intervention.

<sup>77</sup> The project Entrepreneurship and Employability for Rural Families that Have Been Victims of the Armed Conflict or the project Hands on for Peace.

<sup>78</sup> Lebanese Hosting Communities Programme (LHSP) in Lebanon, Promotion of Socio-Economic Opportunities for Women and Youth in Tajikistan, Joint Youth and Women Economic Empowerment Project in Yemen.

<sup>79</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=TM>

<sup>80</sup> Twenty-three youth economic empowerment interventions were marked as supporting persons with disabilities, of which only three effectively included both persons with disabilities and youth in their outputs.

<sup>81</sup> Other interventions have youth with disabilities represented as a subset of the beneficiaries and focus mostly on supporting skills development such as the Multi-Media Initiative for Youth in Cambodia, the Youth Employment Generation Programme in Gaza, the Youth Connekt regional programme and country-specific initiatives.

disabilities, through its Youth and Women Employment Programme. In addition to advocacy efforts, the intervention focused on the entrepreneurial skills of young persons with disabilities and support to set up their own SMEs, resulting in 200 youth with disabilities engaged and gaining vocational skills. In collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, UNDP Rwanda launched a joint programme on engaging young talents with disability for the SDGs<sup>82</sup> through which young people with disabilities acquired practical work experience and exposure to the work of the United Nations development system through assignments with country, regional or headquarters offices of UNDP and other United Nations entities. When interventions were not dedicated specifically to young persons with disabilities, a limited number was engaged. A question emerges about the nature of outreach to them. In essence, if participation were open to all youth, the youth who would be likely to respond would be those who have access to the Internet, are fluent in the official language(s) of their countries and/or are in the social networks that facilitate access to the call for participants, which is often not the case for young persons with disabilities.

**Finding 3. Addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment in the youth economic empowerment portfolio.** While young women benefited from various types of downstream support and achieved results, the youth economic empowerment portfolio failed to address the differential needs of young women and did not contribute sufficiently to upstream changes, implementation and enforcement of policies aimed at addressing social norms, cultural values and the roots of gender inequalities and discrimination.

The aspiration of the UNDP youth strategy for gender equality and women’s empowerment is reflected in its programmatic approach to youth economic empowerment. Of the 201 projects identified for the evaluation, 98 percent were tagged in the gender marker<sup>83</sup> as expected to contribute to gender equality. The large portion of the youth economic empowerment portfolio was marked as GEN1 projects (24 percent), with GEN2 projects representing 65 percent of the portfolio. Sixteen percent of intervention projects had gender equality as the main objective (GEN3) over the implementation period reviewed.

Yet, gender remains a challenge at the level of conceptualization and articulation of target groups in the design and reporting of projects. Across interventions, project documents often lumped “youth and women” into one category and with little disaggregation. This conflation reduced the clarity on the target groups and related outputs which impacts the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in interventions. One major implication is the invisibility of young women as a distinct group facing specific vulnerabilities that hinder their economic empowerment. For example, young women face discriminatory social norms such as early marriage and exclusion from remunerated economic activity within family businesses. They also are likely to be removed from school to engage in excessive care duties for ill or elderly relatives, especially in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. A review of project documents indicated that most interventions did not specify the type of youth groups and almost all did not specify which women/young women they were targeting, with a few exceptions including Mali (women affected by radicalization), Yemen (women heads of household) and Pakistan (women workers in the garment industry). Furthermore, there was little evidence of engaging community members as agents of economic gender transformation.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV%20and%20UNDP%20engaging%20young%20talent%20with%20disabilities%20for%20the%20SDGs.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> The gender marker is the UNDP tool used to track expenditure towards gender mainstreaming. Projects are classified either as GEN 0 (No noticeable contributions to gender equality); GEN 1 (Some contributions to gender equality); GEN 2 (Significant contributions to gender equality); or GEN 3 (Gender equality is the principal objective).



While there were efforts to mainstream gender equality considerations, gender-specific development support within youth economic empowerment interventions is not yet systematic, partially because gender analysis was sometimes overlooked at the formulation stage. The rationale for interventions rarely included any intersectional analysis between gender, age and other vulnerabilities, such as disability or social norms. Furthermore, it did not consider the structural barriers embedded in educational systems that hinder the capacities of young girls to transition to the labour market. For example, across the project design of various interventions, women were included as a target group with a dedicated quota ranging between 30 percent and 50 percent. However, beyond this, the design of outputs and activities did not cater for the specific challenges faced by women and young women in particular. In some cases, the gender quota was not met because activities were not suitable for women participants due to contextual challenges that prevented them from fully participating, such as unsuitable timing or having to travel long distances for training sessions.

While few interventions succeeded in exceeding their gender targets, mostly in Africa (e.g., Somalia,<sup>84</sup> Mali<sup>85</sup>), in various interventions UNDP did not achieve gender parity. Those programmes responded mainly to the needs of young men without sufficient consideration of social norms to accommodate gender equity. For instance, the final evaluation of the Lebanese Host Community Support Programme (LHSP) points out that the low number of employed female youth was attributed to the nature of male-dominated sectors and the unsuitable timing of the project for female participants. Similarly, the Youth Entrepreneurship Innovation Challenge in Cameroon had a ratio of 80 percent to 20 percent and for comparable reasons (only 6 out of 30 prize winners were women). Those interventions, like many others, failed to establish linkages between female employment and efforts to address social norms and to take into account the availability of childcare, social protection and sexual and reproductive health and rights in their programme theories.

By contrast, relevant gender issues have been incorporated in the design of some programmes<sup>86</sup> such as the Skills Development for Employment project in Albania. The programme recognized that the situation of women in the Albanian labour market is less advantageous than that of men. This was reflected in the selection of priority occupations supported by the project as well as the tools it introduced (i.e., active labour market measures) target women directly. Indicators have also been sex-disaggregated. The project “Beyond Bentiu Protection of Civilian Site Youth Reintegration Strategy” in South Sudan was also gender-sensitive, ensuring that all outputs have specific activities that promote the participation, capacity-building and ownership of young women. It used sex-disaggregated data to report on results and the specific needs of women.

Fewer interventions supported young women exclusively which often led to higher-level results, including stronger economic participation. In Indonesia, a large-scale women’s entrepreneurship programme was developed with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Indosat (a telecommunications provider) and UNICEF, through the Generation Unlimited initiative. In India, 15,000 tribal girl students accessed career guidance and counselling programmes; 556 secured internships, 280 held job placements and 263 trained in partnership with IKEA Retail, resulting in 182 women securing jobs in the

---

<sup>84</sup> The Community Stabilization Through Socio-Economic Integration of Vulnerable Youth project (2011-2017), in which the gender quota for participation (40 percent) was exceeded and 55 percent of participants were women and girls.

<sup>85</sup> Almost 50 percent of participants in the “Support to human security in northern Mali” project were women.

<sup>86</sup> The Youth Co:Lab adopted a robust research approach in three countries to better understand young women’s capacity and agency for entrepreneurship. This led the regional project to enact corrective interventions to redress women’s assets and develop gender-responsive support.

retail sector. A final example is the Youth Connekt Initiative in Rwanda, which facilitated the creation of 1,240 jobs for vulnerable youth, of whom 1,154 were young women.

Downstream effects of interventions on young women were noted in the SenseMaker exercise conducted on six interventions and including 146 young women. Respondents reported that the programmes have significantly strengthened their motivation to become more active professionally. In turn, young women felt that UNDP projects had slightly less of an impact on their “skills and abilities” (23 percent compared to 28 percent for men) and “professional relationships” (6 percent compared to 10 percent for men), and more on their “self-confidence” (17 percent compared to 14 percent). Most importantly, 26 percent of women versus 16 percent of men reported experiencing economic benefits from the UNDP interventions and 52 percent declared to have become more active in their communities with the interventions.

Examples of youth economic empowerment interventions addressing gender-inequitable norms that contribute to the economic and social exclusion of young women were scarce. In Lebanon, the Employment and Peacebuilding final evaluation indicated that beneficiaries reported a change in socio-cultural beliefs regarding female engagement in sectors that have traditionally been male-dominated in Lebanon, and the project has also encouraged a culture more accepting of woman entrepreneurs among the families of beneficiaries.

Accordingly, contributions and results obtained by the UNDP youth economic empowerment portfolio were mostly gender-targeted<sup>87</sup> with a few exceptions that were gender-responsive, and none that were gender-transformative according to the IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale.<sup>88</sup> In general, young women were a subset of beneficiaries of youth economic empowerment interventions, invited to participate on terms similar to those of their male counterparts, without much differentiated attention to their specific needs. Across most interventions, inclusion of young women beneficiaries was ensured as part of the gender quota and they benefited from skills development, employment and livelihoods support in line with UNDP gender equality policies<sup>89</sup> and practices.

**Finding 4. Integration of youth economic empowerment in the signature solutions.** UNDP made efforts to adopt a cross-sectoral approach between youth economic empowerment, key thematic areas and the signature solutions. This effort yielded some encouraging results that indicate the positive potential of the integrative approach, though notable variations were observed across the signature solutions.

UNDP corporate policies and strategies have emphasized youth as agents of change across multiple facets of sustainable development and peace and prosperity. Youth economic empowerment has root causes and ramifications that go beyond economic issues towards governance, peacebuilding and social cohesion, prevention of violent extremism and a green and innovative future. To be able to participate in labour market and civic processes, young people need to be able to articulate their needs and have the right capabilities, resources and enabling environments to thrive. Addressing youth economic empowerment challenges thus requires cross-sectoral solutions and synergies.

With the combined momentum of the youth agenda, UNDP gradually linked youth economic empowerment to key thematic areas across various regional and country-level interventions. Youth economic empowerment featured largely as a component in UNDP interventions ranging from humanitarian

<sup>87</sup> This refers to results focused on the number of women, men or vulnerable populations who were targeted (e.g., 50/50 representation/participation).

<sup>88</sup> The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale classifies gender results into five categories: gender-negative, gender-blind, gender-targeted, gender-responsive and gender-transformative.

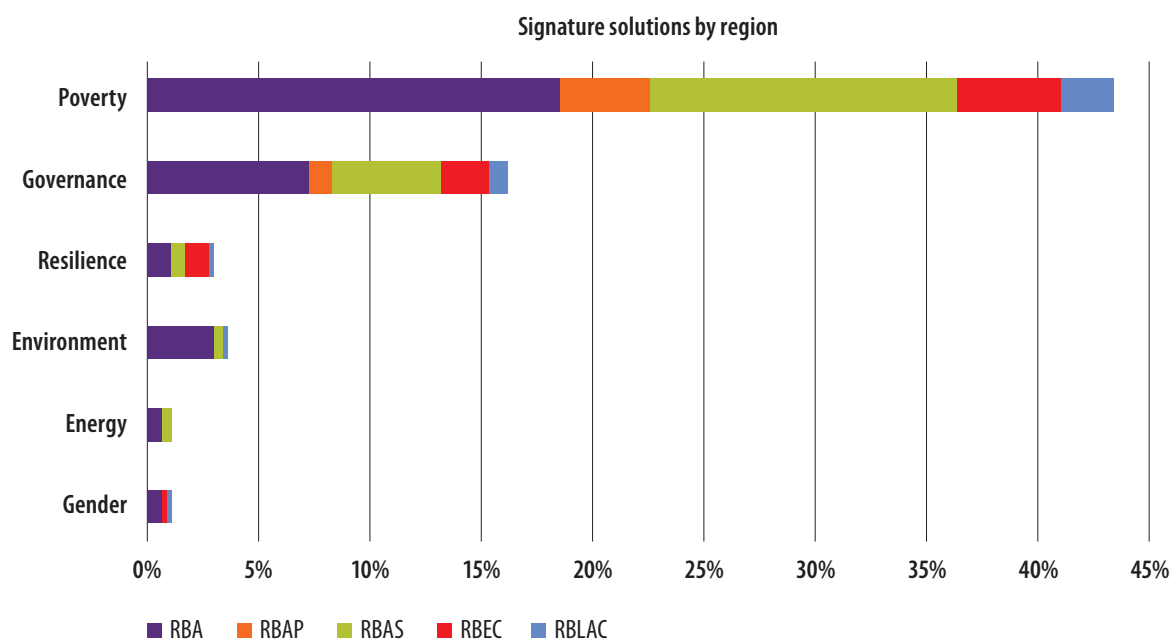
<sup>89</sup> UNDP gender equality strategy, 2014-2017 and 2018-2021.



support and strengthening resilience to peacebuilding and climate and environmental action. When addressing youth economic empowerment, UNDP attempted to adopt a cross-sectoral approach by building synergies, in terms of both resources and expertise, with UNDP thematic priorities rather than considering youth economic empowerment as a stand-alone topic (see figure 6 presenting the synergies of the youth economic empowerment portfolio with signature solutions<sup>90</sup> and SDGs). The strongest synergies were found between youth economic empowerment and poverty reduction (signature solution 1), followed by governance (signature solution 2) and by resilience (signature solution 3), in addition to promising intersections with the environment and climate action (signature solution 4) and gender equality (signature solution 6).

The strongest cross-sectoral approach was observed across the UNDP flagship socioeconomic development programmes that address signature solution 1 and SDGs 1 on poverty reduction and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. In some contexts, UNDP supported national structural economic development strategies that prioritized youth economic empowerment. For example, UNDP Senegal has assisted the national structural economic development strategy since 2014 and worked with the Government to develop the Plan Sénégal Emergent (Plan for an Emerging Senegal), a comprehensive economic growth strategy that prioritizes youth economic empowerment.

**FIGURE 6. Distribution of youth economic empowerment projects by UNDP signature solutions and SDGs per region<sup>91</sup>**



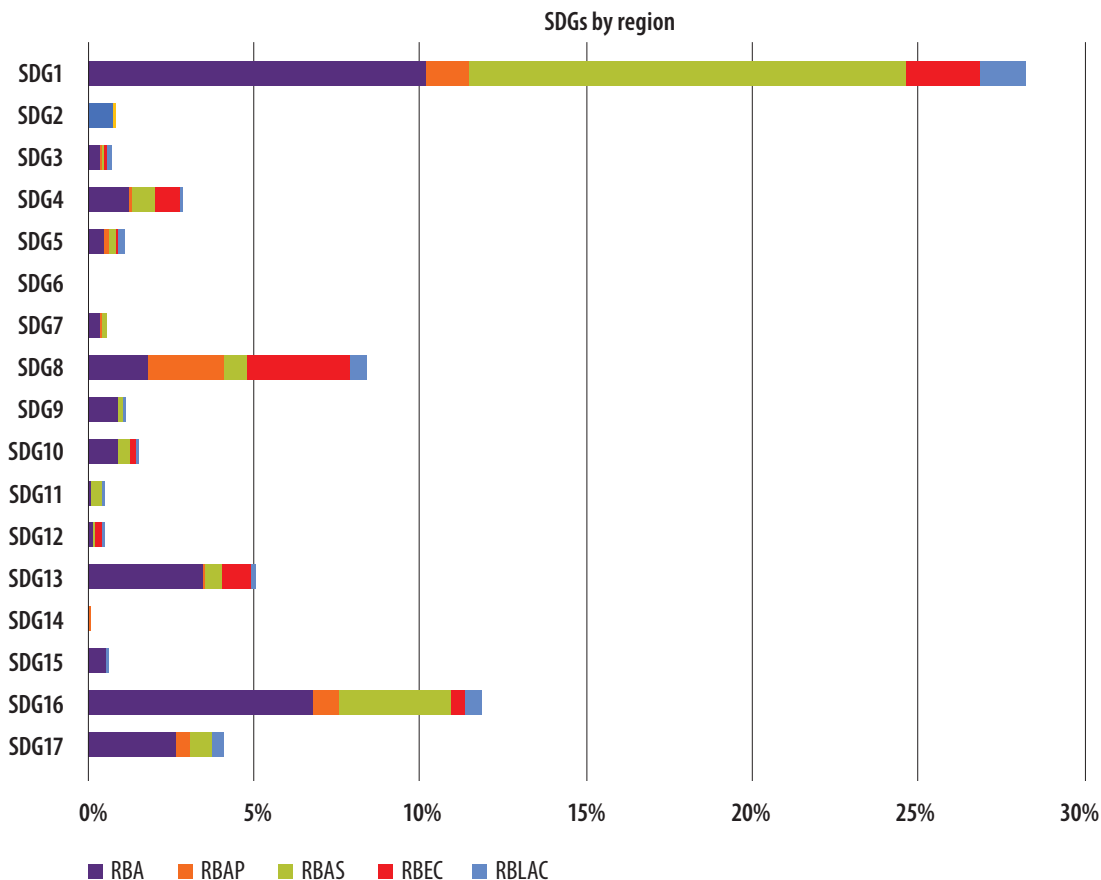
Note: RBA=Regional Bureau for Africa; RBAP=Regional Bureau for Asia-Pacific; RBAS=Regional Bureau for the Arab States; RBEC=Regional Bureau for Eastern Europe and Central Asia; RBLAC=Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean

Source: UNDP Power Bi Dashboard, accessed 2021

<sup>90</sup> The Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 was framed around six cross-cutting integrated approaches to development, known as signature solutions: (i) Keeping people out of poverty; (ii) Governance for peaceful, just and inclusive societies; (iii) Crisis prevention and increased resilience; (iv) Environment: nature-based solutions for development; (v) Clean, affordable energy; and (vi) Women's empowerment and gender equality.

<sup>91</sup> Thirty-two percent of the projects have not been assigned a specific signature solution or SDG.

**FIGURE 6.** Distribution of youth economic empowerment projects by UNDP signature solutions and SDGs per region (continued)



Note: RBA=Regional Bureau for Africa; RBAP=Regional Bureau for Asia-Pacific; RBAS=Regional Bureau for the Arab States; RBEC=Regional Bureau for Eastern Europe and Central Asia; RBLAC=Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean  
 Source: UNDP Power Bi Dashboard, accessed 2021

In other contexts, youth economic empowerment was included in large-scale rapid-response interventions with mixed results. At one level, these rapid employment schemes provided lifeline livelihood support to youth and communities affected by the breakdown of economic institutions/systems. However, while they often paid special attention to most vulnerable groups such as young internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, they rarely focused on youth as a priority group. Furthermore, youth were engaged in low-skilled jobs that did not bring longer-term employability prospects. Related interventions were restricted to the short-term “band aid” benefit and there were hardly any systematic attempts to link these short-term employment schemes with longer-term skills acquisition, job stability or decent employment.

Another strong cross-sectoral approach was found between youth economic empowerment and governance (signature solution 2). Some 16 percent of interventions integrated youth economic needs within a governance umbrella, which included strengthening of governance mechanisms, community building, peacebuilding and reduction of intercommunal tensions. These intersections were most noticeable in unstable contexts and yielded highly positive results due to their reliance on strong collaboration with various national actors, local communities and municipal actors. One example is the Strengthening of the

Municipal Capacities for the Development of Local Social Policies with Emphasis on Young People project (MUNJOVEN<sup>92</sup>) in Guatemala that offered skills training, employment, entrepreneurship and mentoring to 8,423 young people over the course of four years, with 3,000 young participants accessing formal and decent employment. The programme also established alliances with some 300 collaborating companies to facilitate job placements. It fostered strong ownership by the Municipality of Guatemala City and supported the formulation and approval of Guatemala City's Municipal Youth Policy. Another example is the Employment and Peacebuilding project in Lebanon which sought to reduce intercommunal tensions by fostering joint business ventures between host and Syrian refugee residents in underserved communities. This project succeeded in engaging young participants at all stages of the project through local committees that supported the established ventures and fostered civic participation. While the success of the joint ventures was hindered by restrictive national employment policies towards refugees, the local committees have had a strong and lasting effect on social cohesion between host and refugee communities, exemplified in joint local action against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cross-sectoral approaches were also found between resilience-building (signature solution 3) and economic integration of youth affected by militarization or violent extremism in highly volatile contexts, such as in Cameroon, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. These types of interventions have the merit of engaging a large number of youth and offer long-term skills and business development. However, adopting an exclusive resilience approach to address youth's most pressing economic needs yielded low results in contexts with long-standing or significant shocks and crises. An illustrative case is Mali, where the UNDP country office has implemented several projects that adopted a resilience approach to support skills building and entrepreneurship for youth who have endured the long-term threat of violent extremism in the northern and central regions of the country. These initiatives faced immense challenges linked to the multiple causes of violent extremism that the resilience approach alone could not address. Subsequent interventions adopted a multidimensional approach that integrated human security with economic resilience. They redefined the role of youth as active agents in peace and security and fostered their participation in peace processes, governance structures and community life, with greater positive results. The Mali example remains a rare success story of youth economic empowerment-focused adaptive programming that is yet to be replicated or adapted to other contexts.

The linkages between youth economic empowerment and environmental and climate action, addressing signature solutions 4 and 5, have been more promising. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNDP is helping 27 countries deliver stronger climate commitments in the nationally determined contributions which draw upon the extensive UNDP portfolio across priorities such as energy, forests, water, resilience, agriculture, health, youth, finance, governance, gender equality and green jobs.<sup>93</sup> At country level, for example in Samoa, UNDP is working with the Youth Climate Action Network of Samoa and other youth-related organizations on an economy-wide adaptation to climate change initiative that engages youth and women to support sustainable micro-enterprises within agribusinesses with a resilient value-chain approach to promote diversified livelihoods.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, linkages between youth economic empowerment, peacebuilding and the environment, addressing signature solutions 2, 3, 4 and 5, were found in some conflict-affected contexts with low levels of results due to the inadequacy of the youth economic empowerment design. For example, the

---

<sup>92</sup> Proyecto Fortalecimiento de las capacidades municipales para el desarrollo de políticas públicas locales con énfasis en juventud.

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.undp.org/climate-promise>

<sup>94</sup> UNDP, 'UNDP and Climate Change: Scaling Up Climate Action to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals', 2016.

Joint Programme for Youth Employment in Somalia engaged youth affected by militarization in skills and business development in the solar energy sector. Youth were trained successfully on technical skills to manufacture and install solar energy panels. However, the programme failed to facilitate their access to the solar energy job market because costs were so high and exceeded their own financial abilities and those of their potential clients. These shortcomings pointed to the importance of more careful consideration to youth economic empowerment-focused interventions and the viability of value-chain approaches, and informed subsequent initiatives such as the Charcoal Project in Somalia,<sup>95</sup> which focuses on reducing carbon emissions and curbing the illegal production and export of charcoal through developing the skills of youth in manufacturing cost-effective clean stoves.

As demonstrated in finding 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment in the youth economic empowerment portfolio, related interventions mostly included women as a target group and brought positive traction to the long-standing commitment of UNDP to gender equality (SDG 5, signature solution 6).

**Finding 5. The UNDP response to COVID-19 in support of youth economic empowerment.** While the considerations of youth remained limited in the initial response to COVID-19, UNDP has placed youth at the centre of its programmatic response at country level. UNDP played a pivotal role in facilitating resource mobilization from various streams to complement existing resources in support of youth economic empowerment interventions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the implementation of ongoing programmes for youth economic empowerment in most country offices. The impact has been particularly acute in lower-income countries, where the digital divide did not allow for ample teleworking opportunities. Key strategic United Nations documents such as the United Nations framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 (April 2020) indicated that the pandemic would disproportionately affect youth (among other vulnerable groups). On 21 April 2020, UNDP contributed to the inter-agency statement on youth and COVID-19 calling for action for engaging with young people during and after the pandemic. Nevertheless, youth considerations remained limited in the UNDP strategic approach to COVID-19, especially at the early stage. The initial "UNDP integrated response" (March 2020) did not explicitly consider youth in its objectives, priorities or service delivery, although it acknowledged the expected significant impact of the crisis on young people and the need to focus on most vulnerable groups in general. The subsequent COVID-19 offer 2.0,<sup>96</sup> presenting the next phase of the UNDP response, provided some marginal and indirect support to youth-led entrepreneurship in its social protection offer.

Out of the initial envelope (\$500 million) for the UNDP response to COVID-19, 31 percent was earmarked for the protection of vulnerable groups together with safeguarding human rights, community engagement and social cohesion; 22 percent took youth into consideration. Most youth-inclusive responses at the country level consisted of Rapid Response Facility (RRF) proposals (45 percent according to a mapping by the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support), with a focus on Africa (29 percent of the RRFs) and less so for Latin America and the Caribbean (9 percent). The bulk (40 percent) focused on employment and entrepreneurship, although some also supported social cohesion and peace (9 percent)

<sup>95</sup> In Somalia, charcoal constitutes 90 percent of energy consumption, both in households and in various public and private sectors, such as hospitals and factories. Massive production of charcoal is severely affecting land degradation and is used by militias as income generation through illegal export.

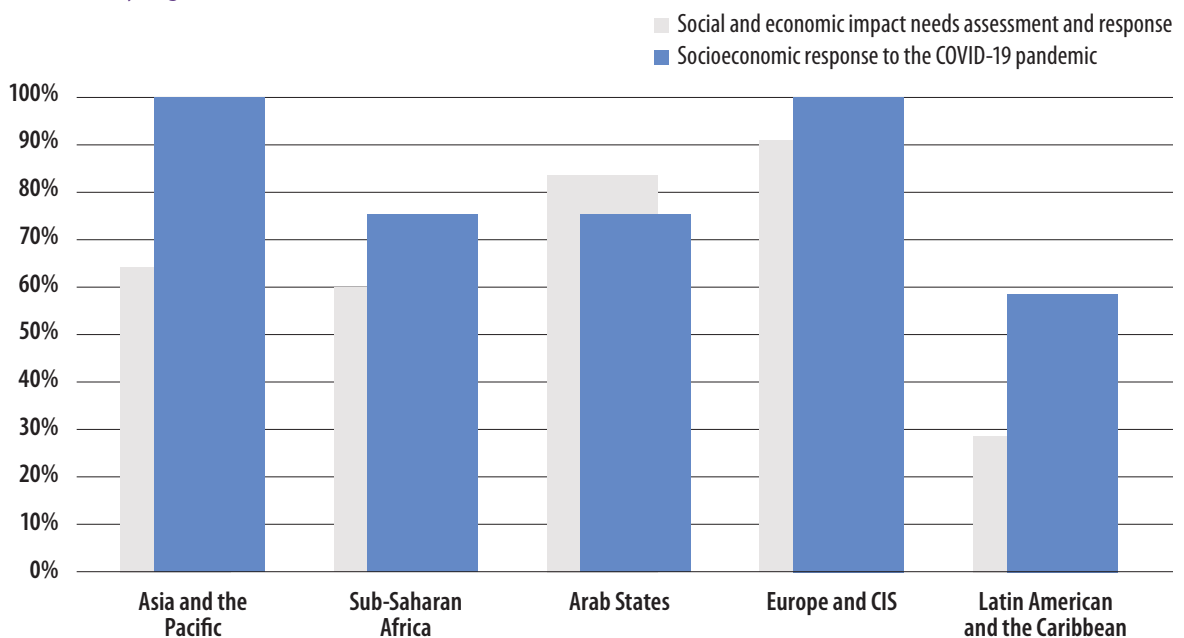
<sup>96</sup> UNDP leverages its technical lead role in four areas of support for the next phase of its response to the pandemic, towards 2030, specifically: (i) governance; (ii) social protection; (iii) green economy; and (iv) digital disruption.

or skills and education (8 percent). It should be noted, however, that most lumped together young people with various other vulnerable beneficiaries.

Youth received more attention in the second stage of the UNDP COVID-19 response. For instance, young people were considered in 62 percent of a geographically balanced sample of 60 social and economic impact needs assessments and responses and in 82 percent of a sample of socioeconomic response plans.<sup>97</sup> They showed similar regional imbalances in taking youth into consideration in both impact assessments and response plans. For instance, 91 percent of the sampled impact assessments in Europe and CIS included youth, compared to 29 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Meanwhile, all sampled response plans in Asia and the Pacific and Europe and CIS included youth, compared to only 58 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean (see figure 7). The UNDP COVID-19 responses, through the response plans, in alignment with the United Nations framework,<sup>98</sup> supported various youth-related downstream and upstream activities focused on social protection, livelihood creation and social cohesion. Overall, 52 countries aimed to reinforce youth employment policies and a regulatory environment through United Nations support under the pillar for livelihood creation.

Overall, youth have been taken into consideration at the programmatic level. Twenty percent of youth organizations surveyed for this evaluation stated that UNDP is significantly addressing the emerging

**FIGURE 7.** Share of sampled socioeconomic impact assessments and response plans considering youth, by region



Sources: IEO based on a content review of impact assessments and response plans, accessed 2021

<sup>97</sup> Out of a reported 121 as of March 2021.

<sup>98</sup> The five pillars of the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 are as follows: (i) Health first: protecting health services and systems during the crisis; (ii) Protecting people: social protection and basic services; (iii) Economic response and recovery: protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises and informal sector workers; (iv) Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration; and (v) Social cohesion and community resilience.

needs of youth due to COVID-19, while 51 percent rated this support as “moderate”. Furthermore, youth in lower-income countries, who have been particularly vulnerable to loss of employment and working hours, have been supported by the UNDP COVID-19 offer. Some 77 percent of low-income countries included youth in their assessments, response plans and proposals/disbursement of RRF support.

From the onset, the pandemic negatively affected the implementation of ongoing projects and programmes for youth economic empowerment, with many planned events and activities either postponed or cancelled. Most ongoing interventions shifted rapidly to digital delivery and incorporated the use of online sessions, while several were either reprogrammed or served as entry points for the COVID-19 response and recovery. Several youth economic empowerment projects successfully contributed to mitigating the adverse effect of the pandemic on young people.<sup>99</sup> For example in Mali, UNDP supported the provision of labour-intensive public work for 500 young people, 151 of them women, to mitigate the adverse effect of the pandemic on these population groups. Based on youth testimonies collected by the SenseMaker, other UNDP projects such as MUNIJOVEN in Guatemala, Youth Connekt and TEF-YEP in Africa and the Youth Co: Lab in Asia and the Pacific also provided financial and technical support to youth-led businesses which effectively helped to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic. UNDP also promoted youth volunteerism in several countries. For instance, in Mali, volunteers engaged with remote communities and assisted in the sensitization and data collection for a local response.

## 3.2 PROGRAMMATIC RESULTS

**Finding 6. Skills development and empowerment chain.** Skills development interventions contributed greatly to psychological and behavioural empowerment with fewer results in terms of economic benefits. UNDP support to improve employability primarily adopted a downstream approach with limited scope for more upstream structural responses.

With its focus on strengthening supply, UNDP sought to remedy through a portfolio of skills development activities the mismatch between education and market demand, the scarce opportunities to transition to work through internships or job placements, and the insufficient job information and integration channels that connect young people to markets. The bulk of support came under the long-standing or “classical” livelihood support programmes that target disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, including youth. The classical livelihoods support stream tended to feature large-scale projects with multiple outcomes, one of which would be dedicated for youth economic empowerment. Only a few initiatives in this stream catered exclusively for youth, while the majority often included them as a subsidiary of a broader vulnerable and low-skilled target group in communities. These initiatives were particularly popular in fragile and conflict-affected contexts to strengthen the resilience of particularly vulnerable youth groups such as refugees or IDPs (Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, Somalia and Yemen); ex-combatants (Mali, Somalia); or those residing in underserved rural or urban areas (Ecuador, Lebanon). However, most large-scale interventions only included youth as a subgroup of the broader target of vulnerable populations, which compromised the effectiveness of results in terms of youth economic empowerment. In most interventions for livelihoods support that were reviewed, youth inclusion was nominal, without much nuanced consideration of their specific attributes and needs. The criteria

---

<sup>99</sup> The mini results-oriented annual reports in Power Bi reported that 37 projects totaling 73 outputs benefited youth under the UNDP COVID-19 offer in 2020, of which 26 projects and 41 outputs were related to youth economic empowerment.

identified for the success of interventions were basic, restricted to quantitative measurements of the number of participants in planned activities. A few exceptions were identified with the Peacebuilding Fund and the “3x6 approach”<sup>100</sup> interventions that included youth as co-creators and active agents in their own socioeconomic development. A smaller share of initiatives belonged to the more recent type of support for innovation and entrepreneurship. These initiatives were mostly regional and tended to cater for youth and mostly targeted those who were highly educated, multilingual and digitally literate in both stable and fragile contexts.<sup>101</sup>

Most interventions fell in the classical type of support for skills development aimed at employment or self-employment. These interventions were heavily geared towards technical vocational skills with some additional modules for business planning for self-employment. In most cases, the list of courses was pre-set and participants could only select the type of technical skill to specialize in from the available modules on offer. Many interventions did not conduct market needs assessments, and those that did ended up with flaws in the design that compromised their usefulness as in Lebanon with the LHSP. In other cases, the choice of vocational skills courses was restricted by the national partner. For example in Senegal, participants in government-supported vocational training activities could only enrol in specific subjects depending on their school grades or in vocational training topics provided by the national vocational training agency. Most vocational training courses in this classical stream were confined to conventional specialities.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, most courses did not offer vocational training in digital technology. With a few exceptions such as Europe and Central Asia, they did not account for the widespread use of low technology among young people, thus perpetuating the technological bias against disadvantaged young groups who will miss out on the opportunities for employment.

In contrast, the innovation and entrepreneurship skills development training was designed with a progressive pedagogic framework based on shifting mindsets and relying on design thinking and behavioural sciences. The model for this training stream presents a leap in skills development approaches, as it was not restricted to any technical/vocational specialties and concentrated instead on strengthening entrepreneurial skills and business acumen. The majority of these courses, such as the Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) in the Arab States region, focused on social entrepreneurship and promoted wide-impact projects, often relying on app-based digital technology. Other programmes, such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme in Africa, focused on private sector entrepreneurship skills development. In both cases, these programmes tended to require bilingual skills and digital access and therefore favoured the minority of educated youth over the majority of disadvantaged job seekers. The potential of these programmes to reach disadvantaged youth has yet to be optimized, with not enough attention paid to low-tech value chains or entrepreneurs. For example, low-tech technology such as mobile pay has been widely popularized across sub-Saharan Africa, with Somalia registering the highest rates of use by all sections of society despite the long-standing political instability. Youth economic empowerment opportunities in the field of low-tech technologies could be optimized by incorporating them in vocational training to boost skills and employability.

In most interventions, skills development activities were highly effective in empowering participants psychologically. Based on SenseMaker data, both male and female participants are generally very positive about the outcomes across the six UNDP projects reviewed: 94 percent of the young people say

---

<sup>100</sup> The approach consists of three organizing principles: (1) Inclusiveness; (2) Ownership; and (3) Sustainability); and six fundamental steps (implemented in three distinct phases, that is, 1.1 Engaging; 1.2 Generating Income; 2.1 Savings; 2.2 Joint Venturing; and 3.1 Investing, 3.2 Accessing Markets), hence 3x6.” UNDP, Global toolkit on the 3x6 approach, July 2016.

<sup>101</sup> YLP, Youth Connekt, TEF-YEP, Youth Co: Lab.

<sup>102</sup> Electrician, plumber, mechanic, hospitality, agriculture or agri-production.



their participation in the project has strengthened their opportunities to find a job or to start a business. The three most valued forms of support reported are access to coaching/mentors (mentioned by 60 percent of the respondents); access to skills (55 percent); and access to information/knowledge (43 percent). The projects' greatest impact is that they boosted participants' motivation to become professionally active (58 percent) and that they learned new skills (53 percent). UNDP projects mostly affected youth beneficiaries' goals and ambitions (cited by 45 percent) and self-confidence (cited by 42 percent), in particular among unemployed young people).

Skills development training yielded varying results in terms of economic benefits. In Guatemala, MUNIJOVEN provided training in technical and soft skills, in addition to labour intermediation services and mentoring to improve youth employability in Guatemala City. However, of the 8,423 young people<sup>103</sup> trained between 2016 and 2020, around 35 percent obtained a formal decent job.<sup>104</sup> Based on the SenseMaker results, only 21 percent of the youth participants in UNDP projects surveyed indicate that the projects have generated economic benefits for them.

In contrast, a few highly successful interventions indicate that sound course design and programming can yield solid economic benefits. In Bangladesh in 2019, 116,450 youth (including men, women, ethnic groups, religious groups and persons with disabilities) received skills development training in entrepreneurship, information technology (IT) and hospitality and tourism, with the aim of increasing their long-term employability; 68 percent of them got jobs. In 2020, an additional 22,750 individuals received similar training with an employment success rate of 68 percent. The success is attributed to the strong partnerships of UNDP with industries, non-governmental organizations, local universities and the International Labour Organization (ILO), which helped to mobilize funding and enhance the management and coordination of the training.

Similarly, matching skills development with market needs, especially in the emerging and/or high-demand areas of the economy, had significant positive impact on employability potential. Young people in the Europe and CIS region have increased their knowledge and skills in the emerging and/or high-demand areas of the economy, further increasing their employability potential. For example, IT/programming courses in Tajikistan showed high effectiveness as most graduates found employment due to the strong demand for such skills on local markets and thanks to the capacity-building support delivered to the youth for job searching skills and linking them to job providers.

The success of these interventions was reflected in the positive assessment by youth-led and youth-based organizations; most respondents to the survey believed that UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions significantly or moderately contributed to youth entrepreneurship promotion (71 percent), skills development (69 percent), empowerment of women and girls (66 percent) and youth self-motivation and confidence (53 percent).<sup>105</sup>

An interesting ripple effect of those interventions revealed by the SenseMaker is that more than half of the respondents from UNDP-surveyed projects (69 percent for the Youth Co: Lab and 67 percent for the YLP) have become more active and/or have taken up a leadership role in their communities. Some 73 percent have shared their positive experience with others via social networks, by encouraging friends and/or family to join similar projects.

---

<sup>103</sup> 55 percent women and 45 percent men. Out of the 35 percent who found a job, 55-60 percent were women.

<sup>104</sup> Sources: Annual reports, results-oriented annual reports 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Source: survey conducted with youth organizations.

Overall, the UNDP response from the supply side relied heavily on skills development activities and invested far less effort in transition to work and access to the job market. Both types of support adopted a downstream approach that addresses the problem of low employability skills of individual participants. There was less evidence of an upstream approach that could prevent the skills gap and offer systemic solutions that effectively upgrade and adapt the education system to market needs.

**Finding 7. Job creation, work opportunities and entrepreneurship.** UNDP made significant contributions promoting downstream youth self-employment and entrepreneurship. UNDP support to upstream structural job creation mechanisms and quality of employment for youth was less visible and was affected by the specificities of the contexts.

The self-employment model was dominant among the classical livelihood support interventions reviewed. These interventions supported the full cycle of skills training, business establishment and financing through business starter kits. Some interventions offered additional support such as career advice, construction and rehabilitation of meeting spaces and coaching after the launch of the business. According to the SenseMaker, self-employed young people mostly appreciate the coaching and mentoring provided by the programme (63 percent) and access to funding and financial services (56 percent). Geared towards the most economically deprived and marginalized youth, the businesses tended to be concerned with traditional industries such as agriculture, fisheries, tanneries, artisanal production and small-scale commerce. Their job creation potential was limited, as most businesses were operated as solo micro-entrepreneurships.

Support for social enterprises was found among the more recent type of support for social innovation and entrepreneurship. These interventions are mostly regional and designed jointly with the UNDP innovation teams. Set up by less disadvantaged youth who benefit from higher education, multilingual and digital skills, these social enterprises tend to be high tech-focused, with a good proportion of them solving community problems. One example is the Youth Connekt Initiative in Rwanda that created 1,240 jobs for vulnerable youth (1,154 women; 86 men) in 2020, by providing technical support, working capital, training and start-up toolkits to set up their businesses, including 474 decent jobs created through the work of youth-led companies. The Arab States regional YLP has been successfully implemented in Lebanon. Since its inception, the number of participants increased exponentially from two youths in 2015 to 12 in 2016, 26 in 2017, 800 in 2019 and 650 in 2020 (numbers were disrupted due to the crisis). Graduates of the programme went on to various career tracks, with some establishing social enterprises and others securing job placements and longer-term employment with various United Nations agencies and non-profits. According to the SenseMaker, 86 percent felt empowered and took up a leadership role in their communities.

Support for upstream job creation and transition to work in the form of employment schemes and incentives through partnerships with private and public sectors was successful in some regions more than others. In Albania and North Macedonia, the active labour market measure has been transferred to the Governments after its successful piloting for several years. In many other countries of the Europe and CIS region, UNDP country offices are still at the stage of their pilot testing and showcasing the results to the Governments. These results once again show that such measures are successful (in terms of the numbers of established start-ups and their survival rate) if the access to funding/equipment<sup>106</sup> and continued mentorship support are offered. The Independent Country Programme Evaluation for North Macedonia, for example, notes an impressive number of jobs created and survival rates of businesses:

---

<sup>106</sup> New procurement arrangements lengthen the equipment delivery to youth start-ups, which negatively impacts the results.

during the period from 2016 to 2018, the self-employment programme attracted 3,162 unemployed youth under 29 years of age, from which 1,900 young people underwent and successfully completed the training to strengthen their entrepreneurship and management skills. With UNDP support, 1,348 of these young people established their new small businesses (about 450 registered/established youth businesses a year in a country with a population of about 2 million people). Moreover, the survival rate of newly established businesses since 2007 is about 70 percent.<sup>107</sup> According to the national registry data of North Macedonia, between 12 and 15 percent of newly created businesses in the country are established as a result of this self-employment programme.

In other less favourable contexts, such as the lack of appetite by national Governments to promote youth economic empowerment or the breakdown of institutions due to conflict, possibilities for upstream job creation were scarce. In these contexts, UNDP has relied on rapid employment schemes (cash for work) as temporary safety nets and safe spaces to support resilience. These rapid employment schemes are mostly low-skilled jobs lasting for up to six months with the aim to compensate for the loss of income during political crises or economic shocks. However, while this response gave participants temporary lifeline livelihood support, it had the disadvantage of tying beneficiaries to precarious jobs, hindering their skills development due to the low-skilled nature of the jobs, and preventing them from finding jobs and increasing their reliance on their social networks for financial support after the end of the employment period.

Based on the results of the SenseMaker, lack of access to finance is the greatest perceived impediment to finding a job or starting a business (59 percent of participants and twice as many among participants from Africa). Access to finance, markets and other resources including business services or business incubators was variable and affected the success and longevity of created jobs and entrepreneurs. In Mali, access to finance was reported as the single most useful support provided by the programme (mentioned by 75 percent of participants).

Less visible was the adoption by UNDP of a holistic and integrated approach to youth economic empowerment through structural responses that foster job creation through partnerships with the private and public sectors and enhanced access to finance and markets. In many contexts, focus on self-employment and entrepreneurship was more common or visible than the promotion of structural job creation pathways. In some contexts, multiple challenges surrounding structural job creation by governmental or private sectors were noted, with implications for the success and longevity of the businesses. The necessity to protect entrepreneurs from shocks was a concern due to the economic vulnerability and risks of young entrepreneurs in contexts where self-employment is challenged by informality, lack of social protection mechanisms, bureaucratic opacity and ineffective regulations for decent jobs. A few initiatives offered good practices to mitigate these risks. For example, the “PAEFP/IJ”<sup>108</sup> project in Senegal promoted the transition from informal to formal business structures. As part of its business training courses, it offers integrated training modules on the legal process of business registration, fiscal requirements, accounting, bookkeeping and information on tax relief for newly established businesses.

**Finding 8. Enabling environment for youth economic empowerment.** UNDP support for the promotion of a more conducive enabling environment was effective in contexts that were favourable to policymaking on youth economic empowerment but insufficient when the severity of the structural challenges at national level was more significant.

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.mk.undp.org/content/north-macedonia/en/home/projects/creating-jobs-for-all.html>

<sup>108</sup> The Programme to Support the Emergence of Productive Families and the Integration of Youth in Technical, Vocational Education and Crafts for Inclusive Economic Growth project (PAEFP/IJ).

UNDP played an important role in supporting the development and implementation of institutional and policy frameworks conducive to youth employment and entrepreneurship in contexts that benefited from a positive national policy climate and the appetite of Governments to promote youth policies. For instance, the success of UNDP in national youth economic policymaking in Côte d'Ivoire encouraged the Government of Senegal to launch the Plan Sénégal Emergent with a strong youth economic empowerment component. Similarly in Ecuador, a joint programme supported the Central Bank to develop and promote the national strategy on financial inclusion focused on young men and women working informally. However, in contexts where Governments adopted a negative stance around youth empowerment, including economic empowerment, fewer youth-focused responses were found. The UNDP role in advocacy for youth economic empowerment in those cases is not supported by strong evidence. Inconsistencies between aspirations versus resource investments in social protection programming were noted as a factor hindering the UNDP contribution to upstream work, despite well-established institutional networks in multiple ministries and the well acknowledged convening or “integrating” role of UNDP.

Overall, the majority of policy support for the development of national strategies that prioritize the generation of youth employment did not adopt a systems approach except for the interventions in Europe and the CIS. UNDP country offices in Balkan countries have the longest and most comprehensive engagement on employment issues at a policy level. These offices, especially in Albania and North Macedonia, were pioneers in supporting system-level comprehensive schemes of active labour market programmes, including skills development, support to self-employment, youth guarantee schemes, subsidized apprenticeships and promotion of quality vocational education and training, etc.

UNDP Albania<sup>109</sup> has contributed greatly to the reform of employment and technical and vocational education training policy through improving the policy, legislative and institutional frameworks and national capacities for facilitating better access of youth to labour markets. With assistance from UNDP, the Government has developed and adopted/approved several important policy documents for the promotion of the enabling environment for youth economic empowerment, including the Law on Employment Promotion that has provisions on active labour market programmes, and national strategies on employment and skills with an action plan and indicators. Furthermore, with the assistance of the country office, the framework for technical and vocational education training has been improved by incorporating quality assurance of providers, harmonizing their functioning, optimizing their network and introducing licensing and inspection procedures for private vocational training providers.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNDP assisted the Government to design strategies and public financial schemes to support employment and job creation, skills development and competitiveness of SMEs. In North Macedonia, UNDP has been providing valuable support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the government Employment Agency since 2007 with the design and implementation of active labour market policies for the promotion of self-employment, stimulating the growth of SMEs and social enterprises and bringing disadvantaged groups (Roma, youth, women) to the labour market through activation measures. The Independent Country Programme Evaluation for North Macedonia, conducted in 2019, found that UNDP involvement in implementing active labour market measures has contributed to improving the effectiveness of employment policy and reducing unemployment. UNDP offices in Balkan countries also supported efforts in favour of labour activation and employment of vulnerable populations and youth through introducing an integrated case management system that connected the public employment agencies and social services and enabled better targeting of social welfare beneficiaries with employment programmes and services. The success in Europe and the CIS

---

<sup>109</sup> The office has had two youth economic empowerment-focused projects since 2015 and a few more before that.

illustrates the potential for UNDP to develop an agile and creative approach to supporting the enabling environment and capitalize on opportunities to ensure ownership and build momentum.

**Finding 9. Sustainability of results.** There is evidence of sustainable results linked to UNDP initiatives in strengthening psychological empowerment and promoting skills development but less for concrete economic benefits from employment or self-employment. Key factors affecting sustainability were identified as the stability of the policy environment and political will of national actors, the link between financial sustainability, replicability and scalability as well as the type of engagement with youth before, during and after the intervention. Lack of follow-up mechanisms and data on beneficiaries upon completion of activities was also a serious hindrance to assessing sustainability.

The sustainability of youth economic empowerment-related interventions was assessed at two levels: sustainability of results achieved by youth participants, including psychological empowerment, skills and employability; and concrete economic benefits, in addition to the continuation of initiatives after the programmes' life cycles. Sustainability of results refers to the long-term nature of economic empowerment in terms of durable enhanced employability through skills development and lasting economic benefits through market access and retention.

Sustainability of employability through the development of youth capabilities, i.e., relevant skill sets and psychological empowerment such as motivation and behaviour, was evident. Evidence from project evaluations, focus group discussions and interviews indicated that the majority of beneficiaries have gained strong skill sets – motivational, behavioural, technical and entrepreneurial – that they found highly beneficial and at times life-changing. In Guatemala, focus group discussions with MUNIJOVEN beneficiaries showed that the knowledge, tools, aptitudes and attitudes acquired through the project were long-lasting and sustainable. They considered that they were more employable and more likely to obtain formal employment/self-employment as a result of their participation. It also facilitated their chance to find a first job/start a business. They were also now much better equipped to shape their career paths and adapt to different contexts and unforeseen situations.<sup>110</sup> Similar responses emerged from other programmes such as the YLP in the Arab States region, the Youth Co: Lab in Asia and the Pacific and the Africa Youth Connekt. Based on SenseMaker results, 89 percent of the participants believe that the results created by UNDP interventions will be sustained in the long term, while 6 percent expect the changes to last briefly or very briefly. Project impacts are deemed particularly sustainable in the YLP in Lebanon, the MUNIJOVEN in Guatemala and the African Youth Connekt, with rates of 100 percent, 96 percent and 93 percent respectively, according to the beneficiaries. Project outcomes are expected to be less sustainable for the Youth Empowerment Programme in Pakistan; 35 percent of the SenseMaker participants stated that project results would last briefly rather than having long-term impact.

The sustainability of economic benefits through market access and retention of employment or self-employment/entrepreneurship was less evident due to lack of data on the survival rate of businesses. There was much less evidence of long-term follow-up with former beneficiaries to determine project sustainability. However, some evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa suggests that the extensive range of youth economic empowerment activities – including development of marketable skills for securing employment or engaging in entrepreneurship, opportunities for internships/apprenticeships, access to mentors and in some cases, start-up capital – better positions beneficiaries to pursue their economic futures. In volatile contexts with an adverse national policy climate, sustainability can be

---

<sup>110</sup> SenseMaking session, MUNIJOVEN participants, Guatemala.



threatened during the course of the intervention. For example, in the Employment and Peacebuilding project in Lebanon, young participants from host and refugee communities were trained to set up joint business ventures with the aim of economic benefit and reduction of inter-community tensions. Halfway through the project and after participants had registered their joint business ventures, the Government issued a policy banning Syrian refugees from owning a company (or a share of it). The shared ownership ventures between Lebanese and Syrian participants became illegal which hampered the effectiveness of this project component. The 2019 project end-line survey indicated that more than 90 percent of beneficiaries considered the employability and entrepreneurship training to be highly beneficial but unlikely to affect their employability.<sup>111</sup>

Sustainability of programming relates to the extent to which the handover of activities was carefully planned in a way that they are absorbed into national economic governance structures, either through ownership by national bodies or upstream adoption into a larger policy or strategy.

Evidence from reviewed interventions indicates that there was a lack of a clear and actionable exit strategy. Most project documents did not include an exit strategy or sustainability plan. Yet, they contained a standard section on UNDP support to Governments to sustain expected project results. The mechanisms outlined in this section were too broad and did not provide a clear approach to sustainability that is specific to the interventions. The lack of a clear vision for sustainability, exit strategy and handover with focus on national ownership makes interventions more vulnerable to disintegration, especially under unforeseen circumstances. The organizational sustainability of Ecuador's Joint SDG Social Protection Fund came suddenly under imminent threat due to the economic crisis in the country. The implications were particularly alarming due to inability of the Government to sustain support, which would jeopardize the social protection scheme that was in place. The programme devised an exit/sustainability strategy for 2021 that includes drafting of a full sustainability proposal and financial strategy for the social protection scheme and formalization mechanisms.

Ownership and partnerships were two crucial factors in strengthening sustainability. UNDP interventions were more successful and sustainable in contexts that had functioning public institutions or where national Governments considered youth as a positive driving force and took a proactive positive stance towards youth empowerment, including economic empowerment. Moreover, clear linkages were found between sustainability and the prior integration of initiatives within national structures. In the Asia and the Pacific region, initiatives integrated with national programmes were organizationally sustainable. For example, the Micro-Enterprise Development Programme in Nepal is mainstreamed in the national development plan and fully owned by the federal and subnational governments. The Youth Empowerment Programme in Pakistan was mainstreamed within the Pakistan Government's Kamyab Jawan national programme. In Guatemala and Chile, UNDP supports public programmes that have been implemented and nationally funded for many years. Such programmes are institutionally embedded and fully owned by the Municipality of Guatemala and the National Youth Institute respectively. In volatile contexts, such as Lebanon, Mali and Somalia, partnerships with national institutions were often hindered by the weak institutional structures and not a determinant of sustainability. In those contexts, some UNDP country offices partnered with various local actors<sup>112</sup> to ensure effective implementation. In Mali, the project for Reinforcement of Resilience among Youth and Women in

---

<sup>111</sup> UNDP, 'Employment and Peacebuilding Final Evaluation Report', 2019.

<sup>112</sup> The MUNIJOVEN project in Guatemala effectively bridged linkages between the private sector, young beneficiaries and municipalities. The network of deputy mayor's offices within the Municipality of Guatemala and UNDP have constantly been in touch with the local businessmen and the young people of the city. This enabled them to gain dynamic and updated understanding of the market needs as well as the interests and concerns of the young people.

support of Human Security in Northern Mali established highly successful partnerships with municipal councils and citizen groups that facilitated implementation and participated in the selection of young beneficiaries.

The evaluation found further links between mainstreamed initiatives, replication and scalability. The Micro-Enterprise Development Programme in Nepal and the Youth Empowerment Programme in Pakistan have both been replicated and institutionalized nationally. Two projects in Cambodia that are fully aligned with government programmes, e.g., the National Employment Agency, are currently replicated by the Cambodian Government. In terms of scalability, Guatemala offers a good example with MUNIJOVEN, which is witnessing huge demand; the prospect of increasing the programme's budget through municipal funds and/or technical cooperation projects would provide a larger number of disadvantaged young people with new opportunities.

Engagement with youth was a crucial and underutilized asset to sustainability across various interventions. Youth engagement proved highly useful, especially in contexts of conflict and peacebuilding. In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNDP facilitated consultations with target beneficiaries and communities during project implementation, with promising results in Mwanza, Tanga and Zanzibar. The aim was to increase project ownership in each region during the implementation period, with the intention of sustaining project results and related activities beyond the intervention timescale. As a result of the consultations, there was local buy-in to the intervention by community stakeholders, who collaborated to identify at-risk youth for engagement in vocational skills training apprenticeships and to launch an apprenticeship scheme in each region.<sup>113</sup> In Lebanon, the Employment and Peacebuilding project managed to ensure sustainability despite challenges imposed by the adverse national policy climate. The final evaluation of the project highlighted the success of the Mechanisms for Social Stability and Socio-Economic Committees that proved vital in securing ownership by both Lebanese and Syrian youth. These committees have been registered at the municipality and are still active in voicing the needs of the youth and community.

---

<sup>113</sup> UNDP United Republic of Tanzania, Prevention of violent extremism project, annual report, 2018.



## Chapter 4.

# ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDP STRATEGIC APPROACH AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

---

The section presents the findings related the strategic relevance and coherence of UNDP in the area of youth economic empowerment and its institutional effectiveness.

## 4.1 STRATEGIC RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

**Finding 10. Strategic relevance.** At the global level, UNDP has championed youth economic empowerment through a clear vision anchored in a human rights-based approach and aligned with the United Nations system-wide strategy for youth. However, youth economic empowerment has yet to be fully mainstreamed at the regional and country levels.

UNDP support for youth economic empowerment was crucial to the broader United Nations system-wide engagement in what can be dubbed “the decade of youth”. Since the designation of the International Year of Youth (2010-2011), UNDP has played a key role in the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (which UNDP co-chaired in the period 2015-2016) and has actively participated in the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum since 2012 and co-convening it since 2013. UNDP championed youth empowerment, including youth economic empowerment, by drafting its youth strategy as the first strategic document dedicated to youth in the organization, in line with the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017. A strong and clear vision delineated an integrated approach to youth empowerment, with youth economic empowerment at centre stage as the first of three interrelated strategic outcomes, including civic and political participation and youth in peace and resilience-building.”<sup>114</sup> UNDP launched its first global youth programme in 2016 and joined other United Nations agencies in 2018 in drafting and launching Youth 2030, the United Nations youth strategy. As a result, UNDP did not renew its own youth strategy after the period 2014-2017.

At the regional level, the scope and quality of the alignment of regional strategies with the UNDP and the United Nations system-wide global strategy on youth were mixed, ranging from full integration to hybrid models. For example, the UNDP strategy in the Arab States region is fully aligned with the United Nations Youth 2030 agenda and the regional office is currently developing the Regional Strategic Framework for Young People in the Arab States / Middle East and North Africa Region (2021-2030). This framework proposes an integrated approach to youth empowerment including civic engagement,

---

<sup>114</sup> The two additional strategic outcomes are: enhanced civic engagement and participation, and strengthened youth engagement in resilience-building.

decent work and entrepreneurship.<sup>115</sup> In 2020, the Regional Bureau for Africa developed “Africa’s Promise: UNDP Renewed Strategic Offer in Africa”, an ambitious continent-wide strategy drawing on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the six signature solutions. The offer is organized around six strategic impact areas including youth and women’s employment and empowerment, which focuses almost exclusively on entrepreneurship.<sup>116</sup> The Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS developed a hybrid strategy combining the global United Nations and UNDP strategies on youth with an implicit regional strategy based on an inclusion model. While the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific did not develop a specific regional strategy on youth economic empowerment, the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and country offices have adopted a systemic approach to identify entry points to intervene strategically, learn quickly and adapt through experimentation.<sup>117</sup>

However, a comprehensive youth economic empowerment strategy that accounts for both decent jobs and livelihood creation at regional level is lacking. Partial strategies that focus largely on entrepreneurship were developed across all regions except Latin America and the Caribbean, which did not have any explicit regional direction for youth economic empowerment. Developing regional strategies is particularly important to boost the demand side of youth economic empowerment at structural level, such as facilitating more open regional economic migration legislation or fostering region-wide economic expansion for businesses.

Country offices employed a variety of strategies that did not necessarily follow global or regional directions. Country-level response was subject to the impositions of national contexts without a holistic strategy. Overall, explicit youth economic empowerment strategies were mostly absent at country level and where available, did not reflect the central, global UNDP vision of decent jobs and livelihood creation, instead tending to focus on the supply side of skills building for employment and entrepreneurship. Initiatives were largely subject to the national Governments’ appetite and drive to address youth economic empowerment. Three patterns for country-level youth economic empowerment strategies were identified: (a) peacebuilding and recovery responses that support skills building and rapid employment schemes (cash for work) as in Lebanon, Mali and Somalia; (b) structural support for employability and social protection in stable contexts that have strong national economic policies such as Senegal and Ecuador; and (c) marginal support for youth economic empowerment in contexts that did not prioritize national youth economic empowerment policymaking such as in Chile and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The rapid United Nations system-wide momentum made it difficult for UNDP to retain the focus of its initial vision of youth economic empowerment on decent jobs and livelihood creation (as stated in its 2014 strategy). The strategic adaptation across the global, regional and country levels yielded breadth and diversity in strategic responses that largely followed national governance specificities. However, the definition of youth economic empowerment mutated and followed the shifts in global strategic responses to the increasingly complex challenges facing youth. The initial prioritization of youth economic empowerment was diluted across the multiplicity of global strategies and the separation of youth issues from key sustainable development strategies. As youth economic empowerment challenges intersect between education-related skills mismatch and structural economic growth policies, UNDP has yet to find its niche in harmonizing youth economic empowerment within sustainable development.

---

<sup>115</sup> UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States, Regional Strategic Framework for Young People in the Arab States/Middle East and North Africa Region (2021-2030). Draft.

<sup>116</sup> UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, Africa’s Promise: The UNDP Renewed Strategic Offer in Africa, 2020.

<sup>117</sup> Taking a systems approach to youth employment, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and Country Offices.

**Finding 11. Youth role.** The UNDP conceptualization of the role of youth has evolved in the last decade. This change has started to reshape the UNDP partnership with youth and the focus of its interventions. UNDP has been instrumental in amplifying the voices of youth at global level. The potential and contribution of youth to sustainable human development did not receive the same attention at country level.

The 2014 UNDP youth strategy recognized that young people are not merely beneficiaries of development interventions, but have the potential to be positive agents of transformational change.<sup>118</sup> Previously, youth were conceptualized<sup>119</sup> as a “passive recipient” category with a focus on poverty and low skills. They were also largely considered a problem and potential threat to national security if their economic needs were not met. Later, most strategies and interventions shifted this understanding to a more balanced perspective. The prevention of extremism recognizes the youths’ loss of economic opportunities or dire economic situation as major hindrances that increase their vulnerabilities. The “Africa’s Promise” strategic offer (2020), the Regional Project for Youth Empowerment in the Sahel (2021) and Frontlines study (2019),<sup>120</sup> among other UNDP strategies, programmes and studies, completely shifted this narrative and positioned youth as strategic allies and bearers of an optimistic future for Africa. This new vision of youth also seems to have been integrated by staff as mentioned in the 2019 staff survey where they emphasized the importance of youth engagement throughout the programme cycle.

As a result, at global level, UNDP has contributed meaningfully to expanding youth participation in global platforms and intergovernmental forums.<sup>121</sup> It has convened innovative platforms and opened up new channels for youth participation at the global level to amplify their voices (e.g., the 16x16 initiative, partnership with Samsung for Generation 17, the digital platform “Juventud con Voz”, etc.). Collaboration with the young leaders of the 16x16 initiative has informed the policy and programme support of UNDP and its partners. For instance, the young participants in 16x16 provided input to the UNDP guidance note on youth and COVID-19, the UN75 dialogues (2019) and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2019). Despite limited engagement in the youth economic empowerment field, the initiative illustrates how young people’s participation can be used to strengthen implementation, monitoring and review.

While the UNDP youth strategy emphasized the need to establish youth-sensitive organizational mechanisms within UNDP, there are some examples<sup>122</sup> at regional and country level that ensure inclusivity of youth in organizational planning processes. One such example is the establishment of the Youth Sounding Board by the Kenya country office in 2020. The Sounding Board was established to inform the priorities of the country office and to ensure the representation of youth. Otherwise, the conceptualization of youth as drivers of change at institutional level was reported to be limited and largely subject to the governance context in each country.

---

<sup>118</sup> The United Nations declared 2010 the International Year of Youth, after which considering youth as agents of change gained momentum.

<sup>119</sup> Youth issues have received attention at the highest levels in the United Nations system (Security Council resolution 2250 in 2015, the appointment of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and rising recognition of the importance of empowering young people). Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) resolved that young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security and identified five pillars of action: participation, protection, partnerships, prevention, disengagement and reintegration.

<sup>120</sup> UNDP (2019). Frontlines: young people at the forefront of preventing and responding to violent extremism.

<sup>121</sup> The First Global Forum on Youth Policies (2014, Azerbaijan); the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security (2015), which led to Security Council resolution 2250 (2015); the high-level political forum on sustainable development; and other global thematic conferences, events and summits.

<sup>122</sup> United Nations country teams in the latest United Nations youth scorecard reported more than 56 youth advisory boards. None were mentioned by country-level interviewees (UNDP staff).

Generally, the UNDP approach has been pragmatic and regularly involved consultations<sup>123</sup> with youth for evidence-based design at the design stage for global and regional interventions and to a lesser extent for country-level interventions. For instance, the Employment and Peacebuilding project in Lebanon was designed based on perception surveys such as those organized in 2015 by the Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion (“REACH”) Initiative and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (jointly), the Search for Common Ground and the 2016 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees. UNDP also built on national surveys as in the case of the Chilean National Youth Institute, whose inputs from the National Youth Survey<sup>124</sup> informed the design of UNDP programmes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP facilitated several youth-inclusive consultations, notably through online surveys (e.g., LHSP, Youth Connekt, Youth Co: Lab)<sup>125</sup> and using social media campaigns (Rwanda). Through the Inter-agency Network on Youth Development and together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNDP conducted a regional survey on youth and COVID-19 which highlighted issues affecting youth in the Latin American and Caribbean region, including economic empowerment. Some interviewees reported that consultations were sometimes conducted as a rapid diagnostic. This is partly associated with limited time available for design as well as resources available for the consultative process involving beneficiaries at the grass-roots level.

Beyond those youth consultations, there is limited evidence of youth engagement in the formulation of UNDP strategies or design of projects related to youth economic empowerment. The UNDP Arab States Regional Youth Team is currently developing a comprehensive region-wide youth economic empowerment strategy, including through consultations and co-creation with youth-focused actors and youth-led organizations. Another example is youth involvement in dialogue organized around the preparation of the Human Development Reports, as in Honduras where the country office invited several youth-led organizations to be part of the report committee for 2021. At the intervention level, while most project documents indicated a participatory approach, most did not specify the type and level of engagement nor did stakeholders provide any clear indication during interviews conducted. The YLP is closest to the co-creation model. Since its inception in 2015, the programme had no fixed model and was designed organically with extensive consultation with participating youth and youth-serving partner organizations. The programme formed an advisory board from YLP graduates to advise on strategy and content and participate in the selection process. According to the survey conducted, only 13 percent of respondents’ youth-based or youth-led organizations are part of a project or programme steering committee. The dearth of input by youth during project design raises a question as to the extent to which the strategies or interventions have been built on the expressed needs and views of the target youth beneficiaries, as they continue to reflect a top-down approach to conceptualization. Youth have the right to be heard by contributing to matters that concern them, and duty-bearers are bound to facilitate this right. Yet, youth engagement during design of economic empowerment initiatives has been an exception rather than the norm.

At implementation level, there is evidence that the perspectives of youth have been considered. The joint programme for youth employment in Somalia engaged youth at the level of choice of training courses

---

<sup>123</sup> Consultations are often complementary of other studies and research performed by UNDP or its partners. For example, in Ethiopia, Generation Unlimited conducted a landscape analysis to: (i) determine where it could add value to existing initiatives; (ii) analyse; and (iii) recommend a governance structure.

<sup>124</sup> Such survey is composed of young people (men and women) aged between 15 and 29 years, coming from various socioeconomic groups and living in all regions of Chile. The sample size in 2018 was 9,700 people.

<sup>125</sup> Youth CO: Lab produced a survey of how young entrepreneurs in Asia-Pacific responded to COVID-19. The survey was conducted among 400+ young entrepreneurs across 18 countries in Asia and the Pacific. It aimed at understanding the impacts of the pandemic on young entrepreneurs and identifying innovative youth-led responses and measures needed for them to survive the crisis.

they received. The preventing and responding to violent extremism project in the United Republic of Tanzania, for example, also included consultations and capacity-enhancement sessions with community leaders and police officers in Mwanza, Tanga and Zanzibar, to engage their support for sustainable local collaboration. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNDP has recently integrated young people in policy dialogue processes, including the diaspora, to work on thematic policy.<sup>126</sup> As a result of the consultations, there was local buy-in to the intervention by community stakeholders, who collaborated to identify at-risk youth for engagement in vocational skills training apprenticeships and to launch an apprenticeship scheme in each region.

Beyond the above-mentioned role, unlike other thematic areas,<sup>127</sup> there is a handful of examples<sup>128</sup> where UNDP tried to attribute a more substantive role to youth<sup>129</sup> in the programming process for youth economic empowerment (e.g., as researchers, implementers, M&E etc.) UNDP is missing an important opportunity to empower, engage and include young people in its programming and planning, and it is not sufficiently harvesting the potential benefits of this collaboration in term of results, impact and sustainability.

**Finding 12. External and internal coherence.** UNDP demonstrated high external coherence by playing an active role in agenda-setting and coordination in international networks and mechanisms on youth. UNDP has positioned itself to provide strategic leadership in youth engagement for youth empowerment in global platforms. Internal coherence was less evident as mainstreaming of youth has not yet been consistent and varies substantially across strategic documents at regional and country levels. Youth are often lumped with women or included within the broader category of “vulnerable groups”.

According to partner interviews and surveys, the UNDP comparative advantage for youth empowerment lies in its widespread presence in countries, its broad mandate and all-encompassing constituency, its strong operational capacity and its convening power and integrator role, in combination with the ability to source in-kind and financial resources. UNDP has leveraged these strengths and draws on its multidisciplinary approach towards development to respond to youth development challenges on the ground, to address their complex and multidimensional nature while remaining sensitive to national and regional priorities to help achieve sustainable development and peace.

UNDP plays an active role in agenda-setting and coordination in international networks and mechanisms on youth. This includes significant contributions to the drafting of the United Nations system-wide youth strategy, Youth 2030, and its accountability framework. UNDP provided guidance and tools to support implementation of the strategy on the ground and participated in the high-level steering committee, the joint working group and several task teams. Similarly, UNDP supported the development of guiding principles for encouraging young people as critical agents of change by the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development<sup>130</sup> and has been an active member of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security and the global initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth. Benefiting from well-established partnerships with ecosystem actors, UNDP exerts its convening power to maintain high visibility for the youth agenda and promote youth engagement in the global dialogue. Recently UNDP has been piloting

---

<sup>126</sup> SparkBlue discussion on youth economic empowerment, 20 May–11 June 2021.

<sup>127</sup> For example, youth, peace and security.

<sup>128</sup> For example, through the project on promoting employment and productivity in the garment industry in Cambodia, UNDP involved youth in the implementation and internal monitoring of the project. In the Philippines and in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNDP employed youth researchers who conducted research from end to end on the COVID-19 response and identified initiatives that young people have implemented, including related to youth economic empowerment.

<sup>129</sup> Only 11 percent of youth organization participating to the evaluation survey have collaborated with UNDP for a study or research.

<sup>130</sup> The network (IANYD) comprises 27 United Nations entities. <https://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/JointStatementInteragency.pdf>



mechanisms to support youth advocacy through partnerships with the private sector (see finding 15 below on partnerships).

The leadership and convenor role of UNDP are visible in most regions, with its strategic positioning contextualized by regional needs and priorities. In the Arab States region, UNDP dedicated the 2016 regional Human Development Report to youth, which repositioned UNDP vis-à-vis the turbulent regional context and reinstated it firmly within its human development mandate so that it addressed youth empowerment from a human development perspective. Most significantly, the report decoupled youth economic empowerment from governance and anchored it with security, reconceptualizing Arab youth as possible agents of change whose disempowerment sows the seeds of instability. UNDP has been a key convening actor and an active member of the inter-agency coordination committees across the region, particularly in response to the Regional, Refugee and Resilience Plan for the Syrian crisis in Lebanon and the neighbouring countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNDP is an active member and participant in the Asia-Pacific Interagency Network on Youth<sup>131</sup> and has played an important role in convening the Youth Co: Lab Summits at the regional level, which have provided useful opportunities for showcasing youth innovation and social entrepreneurship and linking aspiring innovators with potential private sector entities and government representatives. In Latin America and the Caribbean, even given the UNDP comparative advantage and delivery of youth interventions in some countries, the evaluation could not find sufficient evidence of UNDP playing a key convening and integrator role or in exercising strategic leadership or advocacy for youth economic empowerment.

Regarding internal coherence, all regional programme documents considered youth in their situational analysis with varying degrees of comprehensiveness. Some regional programmes took youth economic empowerment into consideration in their situational analysis,<sup>132</sup> apart from the Arab States and Europe and CIS regions.<sup>133</sup> The focus of their strategic response has been mostly on youth in governance processes and four regional programme documents<sup>134</sup> on youth economic empowerment. For instance, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean seeks to address the structural impediments to the economic participation and livelihood of young people and support the socioeconomic reintegration of at-risk youth.

Similar to the regional programmes, of the 60 country programme documents (CPDs) that were sampled, 57<sup>135</sup> considered young people, although they are often included as part of a broader category of “vulnerable groups”. Of those 57 CPDs, the majority provided a situation analysis on youth (except Bangladesh, Colombia and Cuba) and youth economic empowerment is included in their programme priorities (except Mongolia<sup>136</sup>). While most CPDs focused on livelihoods when discussing youth challenges in their

---

<sup>131</sup> The members of the Asia-Pacific Interagency Network on Youth are UNFPA, UNESCO, UNDP, UNAIDS, IOM, ILO, ESCAP, ADB, Youth for Asia, UN-Women, UNV, UNICEF and UN-Habitat.

<sup>132</sup> Most regional programme documents raised the issue of the youth unemployment rate and one (RBAS) also mentioned youth skills acquisition. A few went a step further by mentioning the paucity of youth decent employment, under-employment and informal employment (RBA and RBEC), youth in extreme or moderate poverty (RBA) and young women being particularly affected in terms of economic empowerment (RBAS).

<sup>133</sup> RBAS highlighted the underutilization of youth civic potential fueling violent extremism, while RBEC pointed out the issue of youth lacking confidence in public institutions.

<sup>134</sup> Specifically, RBA (improving opportunities for youth and scaling-up Youth Connekt Africa), RBAP (fostering entrepreneurship including youth-led social enterprises, Youth Co: Lab and supportive environment), RBLAC (addressing the structural impediments to the economic participation and livelihood of young people and supporting the socioeconomic reintegration of youth at-risk) and RBAS (improving skills matching labor market needs to facilitate youth employment opportunities).

<sup>135</sup> Except one in RBAP (China) and two in RBLAC (Bolivia and Costa Rica).

<sup>136</sup> The programme priorities of Mongolia related to youth focus on governance, whereby support will be provided to the Parliament and subnational Hural, youth groups and civil society to identify innovative solutions for engaging young people and increase their voice and accountability.

programme priorities, several considered skills development and a few considered access to finance, social services and social protection. A considerable share of the CPDs (42 percent) also addressed the issues of youth in poverty, informality, violent extremism and migration in their situational analysis but also in some programme priorities. Youth in climate change was also mainstreamed in some CPDs, in the form of support to green jobs for youth, or natural resource management and biodiversity consideration to improve youth well-being. Surprisingly, none of the regional programme documents<sup>137</sup> and sampled CPDs referred to the UNDP or United Nations youth strategies.

Youth mainstreaming at the programming level has been facilitated by the UNDP “Youth-GPS”.<sup>138</sup> It has provided direct technical and policy advisory services and financially supported some catalytic and strategic interventions at country level (for example, the formulation of proposals under the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative, funded by the Peacebuilding Fund), while advancing regional priorities on youth.

Overall, UNDP had a unique advantage in promoting youth empowerment and has leveraged its strengths and drawn on its multidisciplinary approach to position itself globally in this area. Youth mainstreaming has yet to be fully integrated across regional and country strategic documents. Youth are still essentially included as part of a broader category of vulnerable groups.

## 4.2 INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

**Finding 13. Staff and resources.** UNDP has set up a dedicated institutional architecture to support youth empowerment. The effectiveness of the structure is affected by the lack of dedicated human resources for economic empowerment in the youth portfolio to facilitate cross-fertilization, the limited institutionalization of the youth focal points at country level, the “upon request” nature of support provided by the regional structure and the absence of clear financial mechanisms in support of the global youth team.

A global youth team was created in 2014 and is located within the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support governance team at headquarters. Since its creation, the global youth team has remained small in size, composed of one staff member and Junior Professional Officers funded by Member States (one in 2016-2017 and in 2019 and two in 2020-2021). In terms of functions, the youth team’s role has become increasingly central and strategic. It has an internal corporate role in providing policy and programme support<sup>139</sup> as well as technical guidance. It also supports the coordination of youth issues with headquarters and regional colleagues to integrate these issues in all thematic areas. It is important to note that the UNDP youth strategy did not establish a responsibility matrix across thematic clusters, nor has one been developed since. The reporting line of the global youth team remains at the level of the governance cluster.<sup>140</sup> The coordination and youth mainstreaming were affected by the absence of dedicated focal points<sup>141</sup> and expertise on youth across thematic clusters.

The youth team also provides support in partnership-building and resource mobilization efforts and develops and maintains global knowledge management platforms and communications.<sup>142</sup> It under-

<sup>137</sup> Draft regional programme documents for Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and Latin America and the Caribbean (2018-2021), submitted to the Executive Board in 2017.

<sup>138</sup> The Youth-GPS focuses on three priority areas in alignment with the UNDP Strategic Plans, specifically: (i) enhanced civic engagement and participation of youth in decision-making and political processes and institutions; (ii) increased economic empowerment of youth; and (iii) strengthened engagement of youth in resilience- and peacebuilding.

<sup>139</sup> In 2021, the team established a GPN roster of 160 vetted youth specialists who may be rapidly deployed to support country offices.

<sup>140</sup> The global youth team is however part of the Bureau’s expanded management meeting.

<sup>141</sup> It includes the lack of human resources with dedicated focus on economic empowerment as part of the youth portfolio.

<sup>142</sup> This include SparkBlue, Yammer and The Loop, a recently launched newsletter on UNDP youth empowerment.



takes an external representational function in the United Nations system. For example, it is the primary interlocutor of UNDP with the global Inter-agency Network on Youth Development and with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, the youth team responded quickly and provided continuous support to country offices through different streams of work to advocate, promote and support youth empowerment in the COVID-19 response and recovery. It has developed an evolving guidance package on youth and COVID-19 for UNDP practitioners, comprising: (a) a guidance note<sup>143</sup> with examples and entry points for policy and programming in alignment with the UNDP COVID-19 offer 2.0;<sup>144</sup> (b) a list of key documents, country assessments and experiences/blogs on youth-inclusive activities in the context of the COVID-19 crisis; and (c) a mapping of UNDP projects and activities on youth and COVID-19. The youth team has also organized several global webinars<sup>145</sup> to encourage inclusion of youth in the design and delivery of programmes and policy in the context of COVID-19.

Regarding resources, the strategy did not establish financial benchmarks for its core activities in promoting youth empowerment or youth economic empowerment. The team developed the global youth programme in collaboration with all bureaux and relied only on other resources (non-core) funding and allocation of staff. Denmark was the first Member State to support the global youth programme, in the context of UNDP support to youth, peace and security, in 2017.<sup>146</sup> UNDP also received \$150,000 from Italy to develop the new '16x16 Initiative' in 2019. In 2020, it received \$150,200 and \$80,000 from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for a joint youth initiative in Liberia and Kenya respectively, and \$70,200 from UNICEF for the Generation Unlimited youth challenge. In 2021, the global youth programme mobilized \$150,000 in the context of support to youth in the 2030 Agenda and the development of new private sector partnerships. The global youth team has recently finalized a joint initiative with UNFPA for approximately \$1 million to pilot a youth, peace and security programme in Colombia and support its expansion.

The youth team operates the Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (Youth-GPS) launched in 2016. It is the first global programme focusing on a comprehensive approach to youth empowerment, aiming to boost the implementation of the youth strategy, including the decent jobs and livelihood creation priority area.<sup>147</sup> While Youth-GPS was designed as an ambitious programme, it had to be adapted to the crisis and financially constrained context. The Youth-GPS has mobilized \$1 million directly from a variety of partners<sup>148</sup> instead of the planned \$35 million and it is reported by the youth team that it helped mobilize about \$75 million in the field. The overall financial situation to support youth creates a lack of predictability and is forcing the team to dedicate substantial efforts to resource mobilization which remains a major challenge to advancing the youth economic empowerment agenda.

Overall, internal and external interviewees in headquarters and the regions expressed their high level of satisfaction with the support provided by the headquarters youth team. However, the growing

---

<sup>143</sup> UNDP, 'Beyond recovery, towards 2030', June 2020.

<sup>144</sup> The four pillars of the guidance note are: (i) building a new social contract with young people at the core of inclusive governance; (ii) uprooting inequalities and investing in social protection for youth; (iii) investing in young people's role in rebalancing nature, climate and economy; and (iv) supporting young people as changemakers (digital disruption and innovation).

<sup>145</sup> UNDP, 'Youth Partnerships on Research and Data: A Game Changer for an Inclusive COVID-19 Response', May 2020, as part of the COVID-19 internal webinar series 'Investing in youth empowerment beyond recovery'.

<sup>146</sup> Contribution of \$100,000 from Denmark for the quantitative study (and related activities) on youth, peace and security.

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.undp.org/publications/youth-gps>

<sup>148</sup> In addition to the three Junior Professional Officers.

population of youth at the subregional level, combined with the persistence of socioeconomic challenges to youth economic empowerment and its importance for the recovery efforts, means that the demand continues to exceed resource availability. Given the large increase in the team's duties and responsibilities, and in light of the renewed priority of youth in the United Nations system in the context of "Our Common Agenda", it is unclear whether the youth team has the capacity to continue carrying out its functions to progress steadily in this area.

The youth strategies recognize the distinct needs and priorities within each region. Accordingly, the global youth team established regional youth focal points.<sup>149</sup> The number of focal points has grown and fluctuated over the years. In 2021, each region except Latin America and the Caribbean has a regional focal point (Asia-Pacific has two, Africa has three,<sup>150</sup> Europe and the CIS has one, as does the Arab States region<sup>151</sup>).

In the case of the Bureau for the Arab States region,<sup>152</sup> the YLP institutional model, established in 2015, fostered strong regional support to country offices and the adoption of youth economic empowerment as a priority. The YLP was designed as an activity rather than a separately budgeted project and was presented to country offices as an opportunity for them to have full ownership through ensuring funding from country office budgets and appointing country office staff to run it in-country. The strong and empowering support of the YLP to country offices built high visibility and mainstreamed youth economic empowerment across country offices. In the Asia-Pacific region, the youth team is considered highly supportive with strong expertise in social entrepreneurship and innovation. Its regional flagship initiative, the Youth Co: Lab, is widely recognized, including by other United Nations agencies, at both the regional and country levels. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, overall,<sup>153</sup> evidence suggests that most country offices have received support from the regional youth focal points and that this guidance was valued. Interviewees emphasized the value of their technical expertise to help support, inspire, catalyse and share good practice. However, regional youth teams have not yet optimized their regional support role. For instance, they provide support based on request rather than having a proactive role. To be effective, this approach requires awareness and interest on the part of country offices, or time to think and work on youth issues.

Country offices were asked to designate a youth focal point among their staff to support the facilitation of youth-related issues and contribute towards a community of practice. According to their annual reports, more than 100 country offices (over 75 percent) stated that they had a youth focal point. On the one hand, the assignment of the youth focal points and the establishment of the community of practice reflects the UNDP commitment to enhancing its work in relation to youth mainstreaming, including the facilitation of youth economic empowerment. Interviewees commonly reported that the formal appointment of a youth focal point could help to catalyse the youth community and raise the profile of youth internally and externally. On the other hand, the country office youth focal points are required to undertake functions in this role in addition to fulfilling their regular work responsibilities.

While the focal points have the overall responsibility for youth mainstreaming in country offices, the role and responsibilities are often not reflected in their job descriptions. Few of them work full-time on

---

<sup>149</sup> Having youth as the principal component of their terms of reference.

<sup>150</sup> Including one for the regional programme Youth Connekt.

<sup>151</sup> For the Youth Leadership Programme.

<sup>152</sup> The inclusion of some African countries under the Regional Bureau for the Arab States also puts them at a disadvantage as they are disconnected from initiatives despite being geographically located on the continent (for example, in the heart of the Horn of Africa) and having vital economic, security and financial ties with neighbouring African countries. This strongly affects youth economic empowerment in the country.

<sup>153</sup> To a lesser extent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Indeed, interviews underlined that the Regional Bureau lacks specific departments, specialists and budgets dedicated to youth despite the fact that young people are considered a cross-cutting priority at the regional level.

the issue, which explains the uneven level of engagement of the network and sometimes limited articulation with the regional-level initiatives and collaboration opportunities. Moreover, many focal points had limited background on youth issues and were assigned to this role due to the lack of more suitable candidates, with no clarity on the requirements for the position. In both situations, this raises a question around process efficiency of the youth focal point network and whether it is an adequate basis to build a strong UNDP community of practice on youth. It also exemplified the importance of providing appropriate capacity-building to focal points on youth issues.

In general, the capacity to address youth economic empowerment challenges tends to vary at country level. The programme managers are responsible for ensuring that the “leave no one behind” concept is internalized in the project design and implementation in different thematic areas, while the youth focal point is responsible for coordinating with programme managers in implementing youth-related initiatives. In some countries, there is also a focal point for regional programmes. The relationships among the three layers, which may have different reporting lines, depend largely on personal rapport. While UNDP has established institutional mechanisms for youth mainstreaming, the integration of the youth economic empowerment thematic into the UNDP programming areas is affected by constraints around internal collaboration and a need for formal streamlined reporting lines. This represents a missed opportunity for a more integrated and less compartmentalized programmatic approach to youth economic empowerment.

The headquarters and regional youth focal points often organize internal discussions on youth realities, trends and prospects while sharing knowledge and experiences within the network through a dedicated youth contact list and a UNDP teams space. The youth community of practice also has access to a youth dashboard on SparkBlue and a global knowledge platform, youth4peace.info. There is also evidence of some ad hoc capacity-building exercises for country office youth focal points. Nevertheless, no evidence was found of a systematic approach to build internal capacity on youth for regular staff<sup>154</sup> (e.g., mandatory webinar, etc.). One exception is the presentation on youth for Junior Professional Officers, which is part of their induction workshop and contributes to induction and training sessions on youth, peace and security for peace and development advisers (co-hosted by UNDP and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs).

**Finding 14. Innovation and approach to innovation.** The growing expertise of UNDP in leveraging social innovation in youth entrepreneurship is an added value of its work in youth economic empowerment. Efforts so far have not improved the inclusiveness of innovation-driven initiatives for hard-to-reach youth and to enhance systematic organizational learning from innovation initiatives.

UNDP has provided support for innovation and digital skills development, introduction of technology and technical and financial assistance for incubating and translating social innovation ideas to create youth start-ups in countries.<sup>155</sup> The principal merit of these efforts is to transform the mindset of future young entrepreneurs, based on cutting-edge advances in design thinking, behavioural science and digital technology with the aim of finding innovative solutions to development problems. Promoting social innovation in youth entrepreneurship has enabled UNDP youth economic empowerment programming to go beyond the somewhat traditional livelihood interventions targeting labour-intensive areas to support youth agency for achieving the SDGs.

---

<sup>154</sup> An online course on youth, peace and security has just been made available at the United Nations System Staff College, based on the youth, peace and security programming handbook co-led by UNDP.

<sup>155</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, Samoa, etc.

A flagship initiative, for example, is the Youth Co: Lab in the Asia-Pacific region, co-led by UNDP and the Citi Foundation to empower and invest in youth to accelerate implementation of the SDGs through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship. The initiative has reached 28 countries and territories in the region and more than 75,000 youth have participated in the initiative. More than 1,000 youth-led start-ups have been catalysed and scaled up.<sup>156</sup> Several success stories have been linked to industries and/or financiers. The initiative has also taken several steps to address the “leave no one behind” agenda.<sup>157</sup>

Overall, flagship regional programmes for youth-led innovation and social entrepreneurship have shown a good level of replication and expansion. Similar to Youth Co: Lab in Asia and the Pacific, in Africa, UNDP has supported the expansion of Youth Connekt to 22 countries following the success in Rwanda; and in the Arab States region, the YLP, developed in close partnership between the UNDP regional and global innovation teams, has been successful in promoting an innovation and social enterprise mindset among youth and is now operating in 20 countries in the Arab States region. Existing evidence shows some proven innovative programming approaches being replicated in other countries. The Chief Digital Office is leading the Digital X Scale Accelerator initiative to scale country-level solutions, under which, for example, UNDP Somalia is building on the successful experience of the NISE2 platform in Bangladesh to create a platform for skills development, training and mapping to address the high youth unemployment rate in the country.<sup>158</sup> In conflict settings, the 3x6 approach, initially developed by UNDP Burundi in 2010, proved to be a successful and innovative methodology that works with the three phases of stabilization, recovery and sustainable development and bridges rapid employment with ownership and sustainability. The model has been replicated in many conflict-affected contexts including the Central African Republic, Mali, State of Palestine and Yemen as part of reintegration and recovery programming.

Within the context of youth economic empowerment, the establishment of the UNDP Accelerator Labs has created the potential for UNDP to “modernize” its support to youth. The Accelerator Labs have been using citizen sciences, deep listening, participatory systems mapping, ethnography, behavioural insights, artificial intelligence and other innovative or less used techniques to produce knowledge products to enhance collective understanding of the needs and potential of youth employment and entrepreneurship, as well as mapping locally- and community-generated solutions to enhance interventions within country-specific contexts.<sup>159</sup> The Accelerator Labs are mostly staffed by young professionals of the country (or region). Their understanding of the local context and proximity with young people have benefited UNDP outreach to youth groups.

UNDP has increasingly used innovation challenges and digitally enhanced platforms such as hackathons and gamification to solicit local development solutions and promote youth start-ups.<sup>160</sup> In the

---

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.youthcolab.org/about>

<sup>157</sup> Steps to address the leave no one behind agenda include: (i) mainstreaming the initiative’s approach in existing programmes at regional and national levels such as United Nations programmes focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender intersex and queer persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous people and others; (ii) building capacity of 200 ecosystem partners in the Youth Co: Lab’s Youth Empowerment Alliance to reach hard-to-reach groups to enhance the inclusiveness of the youth entrepreneurship ecosystem; (iii) supporting youth-led social enterprises from unserved communities through its Springboard programme by providing targeted mentorship, training and access to grants and funding, incubators, and other opportunities; (iv) generating thought leadership, guiding means to address higher barriers for marginalized groups; and (v) amplifying the voices of youth social entrepreneurs from undeserved communities and advocate for diversity and inclusion through communications and advocacy campaigns. Similarly, the Movers programme under the initiative has used a training-of-trainer approach through community partners to reach harder-to-reach groups, for example those in rural or remote areas or from marginalized communities.

<sup>158</sup> <https://digital.undp.org/content/digital/en/home/stories/meet-digital-x-s-10-ambitious-new-teams.html>

<sup>159</sup> In the Europe and CIS region, Bhutan, Iraq, Maldives, South Sudan, etc.

<sup>160</sup> Hackathons in Lesotho, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan; SDG Bootcamp in Pakistan; Inno4Dev in Iraq, etc.

context of the COVID-19 response, hackathons were used in Kuwait, Pakistan and Viet Nam, among others, to solicit innovative solutions and new business ideas. Financial resources from the Innovation Challenge Fund, which were made available through the Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS BOOST acceleration programme,<sup>161</sup> provided funding as well as support from peers, funders and specialists to successful applicants for solutions related to COVID-19, including some targeting youth economic empowerment.<sup>162</sup> While these methods can be good entry points to engage youth, they are prone to the “digital divide” and tend to reach youth in comparatively privileged circumstances. Participation in hackathons, for instance, requires access to the Internet and digital devices, literacy and in many cases English-language skills, which constitute a high entry barrier for youth based in rural and hard-to-reach areas and from disadvantaged groups. In some initiatives, UNDP has used its field presence and collaboration with civil society organizations working with disadvantaged youth, however, engaging young social innovators from hard-to-reach groups needs to be more strategically and systematically addressed, including reaching out to disadvantaged innovators and targeting solutions towards low-tech, low-cost innovations.

UNDP has also explored alternative finance mechanisms and achieved mixed results. For instance, the pilot on social impact bonds that was introduced in Serbia in 2016 for promoting youth employment proved to be unsuccessful due to the absence of government financial guarantees, whereas it enjoyed success in Finland.<sup>163</sup> The UNDP Alternative Finance Lab supported crowdfunding of SMEs for the SDGs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.<sup>164</sup>

Technical expertise in innovation methods and tools is emerging as an added value of UNDP in partnerships for youth economic empowerment, to answer to the increasing demand from stakeholders for innovation capacity-building. The Asia-Pacific Regional Innovation Centre, for instance, focuses on institutional innovation and together with country offices, provides partner Governments with the capabilities to tackle complex development challenges and promotes inclusive innovation models.<sup>165</sup> In several countries, UNDP supported the establishment of innovation centres such as Citra Social Innovation Lab in Sri Lanka, Youth Activation Centre in Mongolia and the Private Sector Innovation Hub in Fiji, among others. The Accelerator Labs have also supported UNDP entrepreneurship innovation initiatives in partnership with other stakeholders (e.g., Generation Unlimited challenge, Youth Co: Lab, etc.) and enabled new partnerships for youth economic empowerment. In Uzbekistan, for example, the Regional Hub worked with the Accelerator Lab to apply participatory portfolio design and view youth unemployment issues through systems lens and to understand the dynamics and relations in the system.<sup>166</sup> The Accelerator Labs currently use blogs and informal WhatsApp groups for reflection and knowledge-sharing. While these activities enable organizational learning from cases and stories, they do not allow the network to maximize systematic learning benefiting from its wide reach and range as most results and impact are not yet captured by the existing M&E system.

**Finding 15. Partnerships.** The UNDP youth economic empowerment initiatives have benefited from partnerships with sister agencies, youth organizations and the private sector. However, inter-agency cooperation has not yet been fully translated into technical-level operationalization in countries and

---

<sup>161</sup> BOOST is an intensive six-month online programme centred around online learning tracks and mentorship.

<sup>162</sup> Developing innovative online tools for helping youth with skills acquisition, upskilling and finding a job or opening their own business (projects on boostimpact.org: Simple MM – Montenegro, Flourish – Montenegro, Development Workshop – Turkey).

<sup>163</sup> UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, ‘Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Republic of Serbia’, 2019.

<sup>164</sup> <https://medium.com/@UNPAItFinLab/crowdfunding-smes-for-sdgs-and-how-we-do-it-in-ukraine-kazakhstan-moldova-bosnia-and-501b955e0f2d>

<sup>165</sup> <https://www.onlinevolunteering.org/en/regional-innovation-centre-undp-asia-pacific>

<sup>166</sup> <https://www.uz.undp.org/content/uzbekistan/en/home/projects/accelerator-lab---uzbekistan.html>



there is room to further leverage private sector inputs beyond financial assets. Partnership with youth organizations have focusing mostly on programme implementation, but over recent years UNDP has been engaging them more in participation and co-creation.

In the area of inter-agency collaboration, consultations highlighted the added value of the broad UNDP mandate and all-encompassing constituency, which enables joint activities to reach a broader range of youth beneficiaries and brings in ecosystem actors from multiple sectors that serve youth for more comprehensive programming. In terms of technical expertise, UNDP has a proven track record of youth interventions in fragile contexts – UNDP has been a main implementer of Peacebuilding Fund projects<sup>167</sup> – while its growing expertise in innovation techniques, digital skills and innovation incubation support, including via the network of the Accelerator Labs, has been increasingly recognized by partners for youth economic empowerment.<sup>168</sup> Other comparative advantages of UNDP identified by the stakeholders include its close relationship with Governments, field presence and operational capacity.

The perceived disadvantages of UNDP include the lack of country-level, in-house thematic expertise in employment creation, labour policy and market development vis-à-vis technical and normative agencies, and the lack of capacity for economic stimulation measures and budgetary support vis-à-vis the IFIs, which are important for large-scale job creation. These comparative advantages and disadvantages have influenced UNDP in its positioning towards youth social innovation for entrepreneurship. Moreover, this is also a field where UNDP has yet to fully leverage its field presence and convening power to reach and support disadvantaged groups where other agencies may not have easy access.

UNDP has been an active member of global networks for youth empowerment such as the Decent Jobs for Youth global initiative, Youth 2030, the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development and the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security. Joint United Nations country team (UNCT) working groups for youth, which have been established in half of the UNCTs,<sup>169</sup> have been helpful in sharing information and creating synergy. In some countries, UNDP and other agencies partnered in implementing joint programmes.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, the joint working groups have not led to joint programmes, especially when resources were not secured. In partnering with technical and normative agencies, UNDP benefited from the technical expertise of United Nations sister agencies which is not readily available within UNDP programmes. However, the collaboration fell short of effective coordination. For example, the joint project with ILO on inclusive labour market policies in Balkan countries benefited from the application of the combined expertise, but the respective roles and responsibilities needed to be better clarified. In countries where multiple agencies are working on youth economic empowerment issues, in case of divergent views on certain topics, the agencies have not been able to arrive at a common understanding and harmonize their approaches.<sup>171</sup>

UNDP has established bilateral partnership frameworks with sister agencies such as ILO, UNFPA and UNICEF to reconfirm its commitment to collaboration in priority areas including youth economic

---

<sup>167</sup> Peacebuilding Fund projects in the Solomon Islands and Somalia implemented jointly with sister agencies, new UNFPA-UNDP project in Colombia for piloting better and direct collaboration with youth organization in peacebuilding, etc.

<sup>168</sup> The latter is discussed further under finding 16 on innovation.

<sup>169</sup> According to the United Nations 'Youth2030: Progress Report 2021' (2021), about 50 percent (67 of 130) of UNCTs have established a results group/thematic group/task team for joint action on youth.

<sup>170</sup> The One United Nations Youth Employment Programme in Samoa, the Joint Programme on Youth Employment in Somalia, the Joint SDG Fund programme in Guatemala on expanding the social protection system for young men and women in the informal economy, etc.

<sup>171</sup> According to the evaluation of the first phase of the project Promoting Inclusive Labour Market Solutions in Western Balkans.

empowerment. The UNDP-ILO Framework for Action outlines seven priority areas for continued collaboration, including decent jobs for youth, in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery. UNDP has dedicated the Global Policy Network funding window for poverty in 2021 to the UNDP-ILO partnership to stimulate collaboration. UNICEF and UNDP combined networks and resources for greater outreach and visibility of the Generation Unlimited initiative. Through the Administrator's co-chairmanship of the Generation Unlimited youth engagement workstream, UNDP has contributed to conceptualizing the workstream and rallying multisectoral stakeholders. Stakeholder interviews stated that more systematic operationalization of the inter-agency cooperation frameworks requires a better understanding and coordination at technical and programming level in regions and countries, in addition to the leadership-level commitment. In this regard, UNDP and the ILO global youth teams are currently developing guidance for regions and countries to operationalize the joint Framework of Action. In Asia-Pacific and Africa, regional action plans (or concept notes) have been recently developed to operationalize global-level inter-agency collaboration frameworks. UNDP has long-standing collaboration with UNFPA on the topic of youth in peace and resilience-building (e.g., in Western Balkans, Uganda and Colombia, etc.). Since 2007, UNDP and UNFPA have collaborated in over 50 Peacebuilding Fund projects, representing about half of the UNFPA Peacebuilding Fund portfolio. In 2020, UNDP and UNFPA collaborated with the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office and the Folke Bernadotte Academy in developing the youth, peace and security programming handbook, which includes guidance on youth economic empowerment and decent employment.<sup>172</sup> The two agencies have been active in joint resource mobilization for the Peacebuilding Fund and are developing a global inter-agency flagship programme on youth, peace and security to accelerate the implementation of Security Council resolution 2250.<sup>173</sup>

Key global and regional partnerships played an important role in cascading inter-agency collaboration in regions and countries and have stimulated inter-agency collaboration in countries where joint programmes had not been in place. For example, UNDP supported the Generation Unlimited initiative led by UNICEF, focusing on the school-to-work transition, and co-organized Generation Unlimited Youth Challenges<sup>174</sup> in 36 countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, Youth Co: Lab deployed some 20 or more UN Volunteers to UNDP country offices to raise awareness about the SDGs.<sup>175</sup> The Youth-GPS team has served as the focal point for UNDP in global networks, successfully establishing more than 20 strategic partnerships and supporting regional partnership and collaboration efforts.<sup>176</sup>

UNDP has promoted volunteerism in youth economic empowerment activities and facilitated partnerships between the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and other agencies.<sup>177</sup> UNDP and UNV jointly produced knowledge products and guidance, including through collaboration with other agencies.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, UN Volunteers have contributed to UNDP operations. In 2020 for instance, UNDP deployed 3,121 UN Volunteers including 435 youth volunteers.<sup>179</sup> UN Volunteers have been utilized

---

<sup>172</sup> A training for the handbook is under development by the United Nations System Staff College in partnership with UNFPA and UNDP. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/youth-peace-and-security-programming-handbook>

<sup>173</sup> According to UNDP inputs for stocktaking report by the Youth2030 secretariat, as of January 2021.

<sup>174</sup> The Generation Unlimited Youth Challenge calls on young innovators to design solutions to improve education, employment and civic engagement.

<sup>175</sup> According to Youth 2030 initial action plan progress to date.

<sup>176</sup> UNDP, 'Youth-GPS Progress Report 2020. Internal document.'

<sup>177</sup> UNDP has brokered the collaboration between Generation Unlimited and UNV on the topic of global volunteerism.

<sup>178</sup> The aforementioned ILO-UNDP-UNV study on youth volunteerism and skills development in Asia-Pacific, UNDP-UNV brief on Youth Volunteering, Youth Connect in Africa which collaborated with UNV for generating discussion on youth volunteerism in the Youth Connect Africa Summit.

<sup>179</sup> UNV data.



in data collection for socioeconomic assessment in multiple countries.<sup>180</sup> Other UNV-UNDP initiatives contributing to youth economic empowerment include the creation of the Jerusalem Solutions Hub with young volunteers to promote innovation for reshaping development under the constraints of the occupation, as well as the regional pilot programme, Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future, which promotes youth volunteering and mobilization and thus strengthening their ability to contribute to and participate in sustainable community-centred development. While examples of successful collaboration exist, stakeholder interviews noted that the close relationship between UNDP and UNV at the organizational level has not been mirrored in the understanding of volunteerism and the engagement and contributions of UN Volunteers in all countries.

Despite having similar interest and programmes in youth economic empowerment, collaboration with the IFIs has been limited. Although some IFIs partner with UNDP in specific activities, e.g., the Islamic Development Bank collaborated with Youth Co: Lab in research on youth entrepreneurship and the African Development Bank with Youth Connekt, the evaluation did not find evidence of strong strategic partnerships between UNDP and the IFIs for youth economic empowerment.

UNDP collaborated with youth-led or youth-based organizations for youth economic empowerment interventions mostly in skills development programme/projects, followed by entrepreneurship and youth employment.<sup>181</sup> The UNDP comparative advantages lie in its network and convening power and its promotion of inclusiveness, including its capacity to reach the hard-to-reach.<sup>182</sup> For example in Ecuador, to date 26 young people representing 23 youth organizations have joined the UNDP-supported School of Data initiative, “Youth and labour informality”, to investigate the conditions faced by youth in the labour market.<sup>183</sup> There is still room to improve the engagement of youth and youth-led organization in decision-making and co-creation beyond activity implementation. While more than half of the youth organizations that responded to the survey have been participants in UNDP events and about 45 percent have been UNDP project/programme implementing partners, only 13 percent have been a member of the project/programme board or steering committee and about a third have been consulted about programme/project design. The youth organizations surveyed flagged the need to work more directly with and provide more technical and financial support to youth organizations and youth-led initiatives.

Partnerships with the private sector have made important contributions to UNDP skills development and entrepreneurship support initiatives in some countries, and enabled the creation and operation of some key youth economic empowerment initiatives. Youth Co: Lab, the largest youth social entrepreneurship movement in Asia and the Pacific, has benefited more than 8,000 young entrepreneurs and developed or improved almost 1,000 start-ups addressing SDG challenges.<sup>184</sup> At country level, in India,<sup>185</sup> Rwanda,<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> In Mali, for example, 60 UN Youth Volunteers were deployed in 2020 to support communities in coping with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UNDP-UNV Tandem Team initiative deployed national UN Volunteers to work alongside international specialists deployed via the UNDP GPN/ExpRes roster; specifically, it deployed over 50 UN Volunteers to 28 UNDP country offices, many of whom are working on socioeconomic recovery.

<sup>181</sup> Survey with youth organizations.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> <https://informalidadjuvenil.org/escuela/#resultados>

<sup>184</sup> <https://www.youthcolab.org/>

<sup>185</sup> The Empowerment of Youth and Women for Future Employability Skills and Entrepreneurship partnership with SAP Labs (\$2.4 million) and the partnership with Nayara Energy Ltd. (\$2 million), which focuses on skill development, entrepreneurship/ value-chain development in Gujarat.

<sup>186</sup> Included among the new partners in 2019 were Liquid Telecom (telecommunications firm); RwandAir (national airline); Andela (international software engineering firm); and MasterCard (international financial corporation). UNDP, Results-oriented Annual Report, 2019.

Pakistan<sup>187</sup> and Turkey,<sup>188</sup> UNDP has established important partnerships with the private sector for youth economic empowerment activities, including skills development, entrepreneurship and value-chain development. A similar level of private sector engagement, however, has not been found in many other countries. For instance, analysis of the projects in Cambodia and Pakistan suggests that the private sector's role in skills development has been limited and not responsive to market demand.

In some regions and countries, UNDP programmes created networks and platforms connecting the private sector for social impact that have accelerated the support from the private sector to UNDP youth economic empowerment interventions. The Youth Empowerment Alliance, established by Youth Co: Lab, is one of the most prominent networks in Asia-Pacific, connecting young social entrepreneurs to finance, mentors, partners and support and includes partners from government, the private sector, youth organizations, academia and the development sector. In Turkey, UNDP established mutually beneficial partnerships and obtained financing from over 50 private companies to support growth of the inclusive economy,<sup>189</sup> where the Business for Goals platform, established by UNDP together with two major business networks in Turkey, TUSIAD and TURKONFED, accelerated mobilization of private sector support for SDG implementation.<sup>190</sup>

UNDP has explored innovative partnerships with the private sector for youth empowerment, such as the Generation 17 initiative with Samsung Mobile and partnership with Heart 17.<sup>191</sup> Benefiting from the platforms and networks of both UNDP and the private sector partners, these initiatives provided youth with a platform to dialogue directly with private sector actors who are increasingly sharing similar social and environmental concerns with their young client base. The UNDP youth team was able to use its network with youth and youth organizations to bring the youth perspective and ensure quality engagement of youth that centres on their interests. Although these initiatives do not focus on youth economic empowerment, they demonstrate some new ways of working with the private sector beyond the traditional donor-recipient relationship to co-create and co-implement, leveraging also the marketing and advanced technological capacity of the private sector. Stakeholders interviewed encourage further endeavours in partnership with the private sector including better usage of the latter's technical expertise in advising and coaching youth, finding new ways of revenue cogeneration<sup>192</sup> and involving youth in the co-design of the initiatives. Upfront investment in terms of time and due diligence required for establishing partnerships with well-known brands from the private sector is also well noted by the stakeholders interviewed to safeguard youth interests and mitigate reputational risks.

**Finding 16. Monitoring and evaluation systems.** Despite significant progress with the development of the youth tracker and the Youth 2030 scorecard, there are still important measurement gaps on results

---

<sup>187</sup> UNDP Pakistan and Jazz signed a funding agreement worth \$400,000 to promote youth-led social innovation in Pakistan through a series of SDG bootcamps across the country. The training bootcamps aim to engage 800 social entrepreneurs in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

<sup>188</sup> SparkBlue consultation. The Together We Can project, with the support of Vodafone Turkey, delivered the career planning trainings and digital skills development trainings. The Innovation Campus project, in partnership with Samsung, offered Internet-of-Things coding trainings to young men and women so that they may apply the new skill in their SDG-related projects.

<sup>189</sup> For instance, Microsoft provided financing for an ICT peer education project. ICT skills-building efforts were also supported by other ICT companies – Vodafone, Cisco, IBM and Intel, as well as the Government of Turkey. Visa Europe provided funding for improving financial literacy of young people and SME potential in Turkey. Recently, Samsung financed an innovation campus to develop skills in Artificial Intelligence and Internet of Things. See UNDP Turkey Private Sector Partnerships <https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/private-sector.html>

<sup>190</sup> SparkBlue consultation. [www.business4goals.org/en/](http://www.business4goals.org/en/)

<sup>191</sup> Another example is the partnership with the Norrskan Foundation on impact venture accelerators, though not specifically focused on youth.

<sup>192</sup> The Samsung Global Goals app piloted a joint fund-raising component. To date, more than \$2 million has been raised through the app since 2019.

achieved via UNDP support to youth economic empowerment. The tools and M&E systems in place are inappropriate to adequately capture the UNDP contribution to youth economic empowerment at corporate, regional and country levels.

UNDP does not have a corporate results framework fit to demonstrate its contribution to or metrics to capture youth economic empowerment. The 2014-2017 youth strategy did not propose a results framework or scorecard to coherently monitor and measure UNDP results on youth economic empowerment across regions, nor one was developed by UNDP for the implementation of the 2018 United Nations system-wide action plan on youth (Youth 2030). The UNDP Youth-GPS did contain a results framework, but it focused largely on institutionalization of youth rather than development results (e.g., SDGs 4.4, 8.5 or 8.6<sup>193</sup>). While it was reported that the UNDP youth strategy did facilitate the inclusion of indicators for youth in the integrated results and resources frameworks (IRRF) for 2014-2017<sup>194</sup> and 2018-2021,<sup>195</sup> the organization-wide nature of the framework does not allow these indicators to be connected to results achieved by youth economic empowerment interventions in countries,<sup>196</sup> to components of the UNDP youth strategy or to an aggregation of the youth economic empowerment portfolio results.

Recently, UNDP supported the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in the development of a Youth 2030 scorecard<sup>197</sup> to better understand the performance of UNCTs on priority areas described in Youth 2030. After a piloting phase in September 2020,<sup>198</sup> the tool was launched in all 130 UNCTs. It led to the publication in 2021 of the first Youth 2030 progress report on the implementation of the United Nations youth strategy. The indicators point out the strengths and gaps in the implementation of the United Nations system-wide youth agenda but do not provide a solid reporting line on the UNDP contributions to development results on youth economic empowerment, nor does it intend to.

Currently, UNDP is coordinating with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth to develop an additional corporate scorecard for United Nations entities. This represents an opportunity for UNDP to develop a comprehensive framework that could serve not only its commitments within the United Nations youth strategy but also its own need to robustly report on youth empowerment, in particular youth economic empowerment.

---

<sup>193</sup> (i) Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship; (ii) Target 8.5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; (iii) Target 8.5: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

<sup>194</sup> (i) 2.4.1. Number of countries where relevant civil society groups have the capacity to engage in critical development and crisis-related issues, disaggregated by women, youth, and other excluded groups; (ii) 2.4.2: Number of countries with strengthened environments for civic engagement, including legal/regulatory framework for civil society organizations to function in the public sphere and contribute to development, and effective mechanisms/platforms to engage civil society (with a focus on women, youth or excluded groups); and (iii) 3.2.B. Percentage of youth with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS, disaggregated by sex.

<sup>195</sup> (i) 1.1.2.1 Number and proportion of people accessing basic services, disaggregated by target groups (youth is one of six target groups); (ii) 1.1.2.2 Number and proportion of people accessing financial services and non-financial assets, disaggregated by target groups: (a) Poor; (b) Women; (c) Persons with disabilities; (d) Youth; (e) Other marginalized groups; (iii) 1.3.1.1 Number of countries with recovery plans and systems in place utilizing sex, age and disability disaggregated data and gender analysis; (iv) 2.2.2.5. Number of countries that adopt and implement, with UNDP assistance, legal and regulatory frameworks that enable civil society to function in the public sphere and contribute to sustainable development: youth groups are one of them; (v) 2.1.2.1 Number of countries with policy measures and institutional capacities in place to increase access to social protection schemes, disaggregated by target groups (age/sex).

<sup>196</sup> The IRRF of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 includes several indicators that are either age-disaggregated, youth-inclusive bundled with other groups or youth-focused. The previous IRRF had eight indicators in the framework. In the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, out of these indicators, six (three youth-inclusive and youth-focused, and three age-disaggregated) relate to youth economic empowerment, compared to five (all age-disaggregated) in the 2014-2017 plan.

<sup>197</sup> <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Youth-2030-UNCT-Scorecard-Nov-20-PDF.pdf>

<sup>198</sup> In Ethiopia, Costa Rica and Uzbekistan.

Beyond the Youth 2030 scorecard, another important landmark was achieved in 2016 with the roll-out of the corporate “leaving no one behind” youth marker as a way to improve the monitoring and data systems to better track expenditure related to youth. This represents an important achievement for a more robust M&E system. While its implementation has undoubtedly improved the tracking of youth-related interventions, there are mixed views on the current usefulness of the youth marker as it stands and concerns about the subjective nature of the exercise. Evidence suggests that the tool is misleading and cannot provide an accurate picture of funds specifically directed to youth or youth economic empowerment in UNDP interventions.<sup>199</sup> The accuracy of the information is also compromised by the nature of the marker;<sup>200</sup> there are variations in the attribution due to inconsistent practices by project managers as well as the fact that there is no standardized and institutionalized quality control in place to monitor its implementation. Contrary to other UNDP markers such as the gender marker, the scope and nature of the youth marker do yet not seem to contribute to improved awareness of youth mainstreaming, according to interviewees.

The results-oriented annual report has become the main driver of reporting on youth economic empowerment. With the launch of its youth strategy, in 2016 UNDP incorporated several youth considerations<sup>201</sup> in its reporting process. Those considerations were not all included in the new report template for 2018-2020. Reporting on youth economic empowerment is thus now conditional on the existence of youth-related outcomes/outputs in CPDs. While the annual reports can be a useful source of self-reported data and could provide an overview of youth at country level, they do not systematically produce information on the type and quality of youth results or progress over time. The information on youth economic empowerment contained in the reports is often overly positive, partial and at time repeated from one year to another. This is also in part due to restrictions in the number of characters per text box. The effectiveness of the annual reports also appears to depend upon staff access to M&E data on youth and diligence in the reporting.

While some countries make good use of their CPD results framework to cascade up project results, in general, there are limited examples of performance indicators that specifically measure the extent to which UNDP programming has facilitated youth economic empowerment.<sup>202</sup> For example, the indicators in the Pakistan CPD are associated with the number of individuals trained but lack information on the number of trained individuals who have had sustained employment or gainful employment (impact of trainings). The Cambodia CPD indicators report the number of visits to the employment service centres but do not capture the percentage of visitors that actually applied for jobs and ended up getting and retaining decent jobs. Moreover, those indicators often don’t have baselines and target definition, including for flagship regional programmes.

The same observations are valid at the level of the regional programme. Only the programmes for Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and the CIS include outputs dedicated to youth or youth economic empowerment. Similar observations can be made at project level. There is broad recognition

---

<sup>199</sup> This represents an important limitation faced by the evaluation, as reported in chapter 2 of this report.

<sup>200</sup> Tracking resources used rather than results achieved, type of engagement or nature of the role of youth in the intervention.

<sup>201</sup> (i) Check list on key topics of interventions (e.g., promoting youth empowerment and working with young people as development partners); (ii) check list on target group (youth been one of the options); (iii) youth empowerment in section C5 with a check list on the existence of a youth focal point; (iv) one narrative section on results achieved for expanding opportunities for youth F1.1.

<sup>202</sup> The results framework of the sampled CPDs include 195 indicators that are either age-disaggregated, youth-inclusive or youth-focused (of which 26 percent originate from the CPDs in Africa). Many consist in youth-inclusive indicators at both the output and outcome levels (except in the Arab States region and, to a lesser extent, Europe and CIS, where youth-related indicators are mostly age-disaggregated); 72 percent of them relate broadly to youth economic empowerment.

that youth economic empowerment initiatives have benefited youth in empowering them in different ways like skills enhancement, access to labour market information and livelihood opportunities through direct employment in industries and services and self-employment through interventions to develop micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. However, the design of interventions was primarily focused on short-term/immediate outputs. They largely missed a clear articulation of the medium-term outcomes and pathways leading to the ultimate impact of access to decent jobs and productive employment. Moreover, although UNDP has provided support for youth access to sustainable livelihood opportunities, it has not established mechanisms to determine the long-term impact of its investment. There is currently no practice to follow up on progress or achievement after the project participation or project completion missing an opportunity to build UNDP knowledge on youth economic empowerment and long-term results and constraints.

Outputs were overwhelmingly quantitative and restricted to the number of participants in activities, rather than sound and carefully constructed qualitative indicators of the psychological, behavioural and economic benefits intended to be achieved. Consequently, documented results tend to be more descriptive than analytical. This should also be partially attributed to the lack of clarity on an operational definition of 'youth economic empowerment', the drivers supporting the empowerment chain but also the fact that the youth agenda is relatively recent in UNDP.

Beyond the limitations of the results framework and reporting practices, limitations of the M&E system can also be partially ascribed to the narrow support provided by UNDP to build capacities in M&E to national partners. This has contributed to the emergent situations that compromise the capacity for results achievement but also the lack of uniformity in the results reporting and the scarcity of disaggregated data on various groups of youth.

Of the 201 youth economic empowerment interventions, only 19 percent have conducted decentralized evaluations, which is lower than the average coverage of UNDP project evaluations of 46 percent over the period 2017-2020. Regarding their quality, 75 percent were rated by IEO of which 70 percent achieved a rating of satisfactory or moderately satisfactory. This raises the question of the appropriate coverage and quality of the evaluation base to compensate for limitations relating to the design of indicators and the monitoring and reporting practices.

# CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

---

## 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion 1.<sup>203</sup> UNDP has positioned itself as a key player in youth economic empowerment and played an important role within the United Nations system in global agenda-setting.** UNDP created an organizational momentum for youth mainstreaming with the launch of its youth strategy in 2014, the first youth-dedicated strategic in the organization with a vision anchored in a human rights-based approach to youth empowerment. The strategy was an important step that boosted the unique global positioning of UNDP on youth economic empowerment. Subsequently, UNDP actively collaborated in shaping the United Nations system-wide vision on youth through the Youth 2030 strategy, and co-convened and joined various youth economic empowerment-related inter-agency platforms.

The strength of UNDP on youth economic empowerment lies in its widespread presence in countries, its broad mandate and all-encompassing constituency, its convening power and capacity to integrate youth economic empowerment to other areas in combination with the ability to source in-kind and financial resources. Benefiting from well-established partnerships, the institution has been successfully exerting its convening power to maintain high visibility of the youth agenda and promote youth engagement in global dialogues. The broad nature of the youth strategy has allowed UNDP to explore different approaches to youth economic empowerment in search of its niche and value proposition. While its value addition on youth economic empowerment is not equally well leveraged across all regions, it remains in the organization's capacity to apply a cross-sectoral approach to youth economic empowerment in support of the signature solutions, its holistic programmatic approach to youth economic empowerment by combining several types of youth economic empowerment support (combining supply, demand and enabling environment support) as well as its recognized innovative approaches, particularly in promoting social entrepreneurship.

Key to this progress has been the fact that UNDP built institutional structures and tools to support youth mainstreaming. This has been instrumental in advancing the youth agenda in the organization and ultimately helped in strengthening youth economic empowerment results. The UNDP youth strategy was catalytic in establishing a dedicated internal infrastructure and in developing key instruments and guidance material to support youth mainstreaming (e.g., youth global team, regional youth focal points, etc.). The youth global team and the regional youth focal points have energetically championed the youth agenda within and outside the organization.

**Conclusion 2.<sup>204</sup> The UNDP global vision for youth economic empowerment has yet to be mainstreamed across the organization. The recent and uneven implementation across global, regional**

---

<sup>203</sup> Linked to findings 4, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

<sup>204</sup> Linked to findings 4, 10 and 12.



**and national levels diminishes the unique role of UNDP in youth economic empowerment.** There were recognized and valuable efforts to support youth economic empowerment across various thematic areas, but UNDP has not adopted a cross-sectoral approach at regional and national levels, as the global vision was not sufficiently mainstreamed. At regional level, beyond the necessary contextual adaptations, there were discrepancies in the extent to which a proactive youth economic empowerment agenda was adopted. Overall, explicit youth economic empowerment strategies were mostly absent at regional and country levels, and where strategies were in place, they did not reflect the central global UNDP vision or tried to define the UNDP niche and unique contribution.

Efforts to intersect youth economic empowerment with the six signature solutions were mostly noted in the areas of governance, peacebuilding and resilience, with promising efforts in environment and climate action and innovation. However, in most cases, disconnected efforts to address various youth economic empowerment issues did not follow a comprehensive long-term national strategy which would allow the organization to have a more significant impact on youth economic empowerment.

**Conclusion 3.<sup>205</sup> UNDP achieved mixed results in supporting youth economic empowerment. While economic empowerment and skills development were noted at the individual level, UNDP did not make a significant contribution towards youth access to decent jobs and productive employment of youth at a larger scale.** UNDP contributions towards youth access to decent jobs and productive employment prioritized supply over demand and insufficiently adopted a holistic approach needed to address structural challenges. While positive results were observed regarding the psychological and behavioural empowerment of youth participating in UNDP programmes, these did not always lead to concrete results in advancing economic benefits for youth. UNDP focused on supporting supply, mostly through skills development, with a downstream approach that did not address structural responses. UNDP support for boosting demand for youth workers focused on youth self-employment, entrepreneurship and social enterprise. This focus hindered more holistic and integrated approaches to sustainability, as it largely ignored the multiple challenges surrounding structural job creation by governmental or private sectors. Moreover, little attention was dedicated to the enabling environment with very few tangible results. This was due to UNDP favouring agency and responsibility of individuals over the creation of a conducive enabling environment and the dominant absence of a systems approach. UNDP also faced significant limitations to address structural challenges such as the severity of these challenges (weak institutions, adverse stance towards youth, economic vulnerability, fragile and conflict-affected contexts, etc.), lack of interest and weak political will of national actors as well as resource limitations.

**Conclusion 4.<sup>206</sup> While UNDP mainstreamed “leave no one behind” principles in interventions for youth economic empowerment and was successful in reaching and benefiting many disadvantaged individuals, its contributions to upstream changes in social norms and the root causes of inequalities and discrimination were very limited, specifically with regard to gender.** UNDP interventions across regions prioritized and targeted vulnerable youth groups and delivered benefits to them. In its programming, women and youth are often categorized, without differentiation, under the umbrella of vulnerable groups. Their respective needs are not specified and thus often not attended to. While UNDP made significant efforts in mainstreaming gender equality and women’s empowerment in youth economic empowerment activities, most of the interventions so far have been focused on ensuring parity of participation between men and women. UNDP has not yet succeeded in addressing the differential needs of young women nor contributed to upstream changes in social norms, cultural values

---

<sup>205</sup> Linked to findings 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

<sup>206</sup> Linked to findings 1, 2, 3 and 14.



and the root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination. UNDP missed important opportunities to include young woman more systematically by conducting robust gender analysis at the formulation stage of interventions.

**Conclusion 5.<sup>207</sup> UNDP has not yet leveraged its strategic partnerships behind a clear youth economic empowerment strategy. Despite a long-standing and unique positioning as an agenda setter and partnership leader, UNDP did not optimize its convening power to rally Governments and the private sector around a strong youth economic empowerment agenda and further collaborate with sister agencies at country level.** UNDP youth economic empowerment programming in many countries was often disproportionately subject to the lack of interest and political will of national Governments to prioritize the issue. The UNDP role as an advocate for youth economic rights was particularly compromised as it had little influence on the uptake of youth-focused economic empowerment policy, which largely depended on the stance of national Governments or on the geopolitical funding priorities of donors.

The cross-sectoral approach was envisioned by the UNDP youth strategy, reinforced with the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy and essentially implemented in the area of youth, peace and security. In contrast, UNDP has not sufficiently followed this approach in youth economic empowerment. A cross-sectoral approach requires that UNDP better integrates its partnerships behind a clear and comprehensive youth strategy with a medium- to long-term framework.

UNDP has established bilateral partnerships strategies with sister agencies (such as ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA, etc.) to promote youth economic empowerment among other areas including youth engagement and advocacy as well as youth, peace and security. The partnerships benefited from their thematic expertise and opportunities to leverage joint networks and resources. Global inter-agency cooperation strategies have not yet been fully translated into technical-level operationalization in countries.

Despite having a shared interest in youth economic empowerment, IFIs and the private sector have not been sufficiently engaged in UNDP youth economic empowerment activities. Although attempts were made to collaborate, engagements often appeared fragmented, opportunistic and not oriented to support a well-conceived youth economic empowerment strategy. Similarly, despite the clear recognition of their role in development, UNDP has developed limited partnerships with youth organizations at country level, which could have helped to lobby Governments and civil society for more engagement. UNDP has not established youth-sensitive organizational mechanisms to go beyond implementing activities towards ensuring youth participation in programming and co-creation to support its ambitions for youth economic empowerment.

**Conclusion 6.<sup>208</sup> The UNDP results framework and monitoring systems are not currently able to adequately measure and demonstrate its results in youth economic empowerment.** The impact of the youth organizational architecture and dedicated tools have been limited by their uneven implementation between regions, insufficient institutionalization at country level and the limitation of some tools such as the youth marker. Youth mainstreaming is still mostly driven by a few champions and not sufficiently integrated in the rest of the organization. The absence of a responsibility matrix and reporting lines across thematic clusters and country offices has contributed to this phenomenon.

Most importantly, tools and processes for M&E have not been sufficiently developed and applied to youth economic empowerment. UNDP does not have a corporate results framework for youth or youth

---

<sup>207</sup> Linked to findings 4, 7, 12 and 15.

<sup>208</sup> Linked to findings 13 and 16.

economic empowerment and there are deficiencies in reporting practices, the selection of indicators and the corporate youth marker that raise issues of reliability and usefulness. The rate of coverage of evaluations of youth economic empowerment issues is well below the corporate average. This has affected the ability of UNDP to capture and measure its contribution to youth economic empowerment and impacted learning opportunities to improve future interventions and support resources mobilization efforts.

**Conclusion 7.<sup>209</sup> UNDP is emerging as a global leader in promoting youth social innovation, but the inclusion of hard-to-reach youth and low-tech value chains remains challenging.** UNDP has made increasing investments to build capacity both internally and externally to support youth innovation and social entrepreneurship. Accelerator Labs and regional innovation teams have been key in modernizing the UNDP approach. Its growing expertise in youth social innovation is being recognized by stakeholders and has stimulated new partnerships.

Challenges remain to channel these good practices and innovation techniques towards engaging and addressing the needs of hard-to-reach youth. UNDP programming in innovation lacked a targeting strategy to specify how young women, youth without formal education, youth with disabilities, youth who are migrants or from ethnic minorities, etc. would be reached and included. Supporting innovative ideas and solutions to tackle global social challenges and to provide incubation, mentoring and start-up funding for winning ideas have been timely initiatives for contexts with a thriving private sector. However, their prospects for upscaling may be weaker in less developed countries where the private sector is still emerging. From a pro-poor perspective, the design of UNDP innovation activities seems to focus more on add-on initiatives without linkages to large-scale programmes and poverty reduction efforts at the country level with adequate focus on youth.

**Conclusion 8.<sup>210</sup> The major challenge of resource mobilization for youth economic empowerment work was not addressed in a systematic manner by the organization. Despite occasional resource mobilization successes, UNDP still lacks a clearly defined and structured funding strategy rooted in its comparative advantage for youth economic empowerment.** The lack of interest by many Governments and donors, the absence of a clearly defined resource mobilization strategy and also the ability of UNDP to demonstrate its value proposition are key hindering factors. While UNDP has highlighted youth economic empowerment at the corporate level, resources allocated to programming and staff by the organization have been limited and volatile. This creates a contradiction between the ambitions of UNDP on youth economic empowerment and its institutional commitment.

**Conclusion 9.<sup>211</sup> UNDP has placed youth at the centre of its COVID-19 response, demonstrating the importance of youth economic empowerment as well as the engagement of UNDP in recovery efforts.** UNDP quickly recognized the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on youth and repurposed funds and programme to address challenges faced by youth during the pandemic. It has also played a pivotal role in facilitating resource mobilization from various streams to complement existing resources in support of youth economic empowerment interventions.

Most importantly, while the UNDP strategic response to COVID-19 did not initially consider youth, UNDP has placed youth at the centre of its programmatic response at country level. This is a harbinger of the UNDP commitment to youth economic empowerment in recovery efforts as well as the relevance of this area during the implementation of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

---

<sup>209</sup> Linked to findings 2, 3, 9 and 14.

<sup>210</sup> Linked to findings 10 and 13.

<sup>211</sup> Linked to finding 5.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

### RECOMMENDATION 1<sup>212</sup>



**UNDP should prioritize interconnection and synergies between employability, job creation and enabling environment interventions, instead of stand-alone interventions focusing on capacity development or entrepreneurship**

Further emphasis is needed on the deficit of labour demand and on the creation of a conducive enabling environment and self-employment ecosystems that facilitate both the quantity and the quality of jobs for young people. Thus, UNDP has to further incorporate support for youth economic empowerment within wider sectoral strategies and upstream programmes, including social protection programming. UNDP should prioritize long-term interventions seeking to remove structural barriers for marginalized youth, bolster social protection and address youth's challenges in the informal sector. In this vein, more attention is needed in supporting duty-bearers to ensure that youth have access to “decent work”.

UNDP should further leverage its favourable positioning to influence national agendas in support of youth and their economic empowerment and deploy efforts to create national awareness and consensus towards making youth economic empowerment a priority on national development agendas.

### Management response: **Accepted**



UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation. UNDP is already committed to promoting portfolio approaches on youth employment and empowerment, addressing the bottlenecks and vulnerabilities of the ecosystem in which they evolve, while promoting the drivers that are transformative. The UNDP focus is to protect and empower youth with integrated packages of services (social protection, business development services, labour market solutions, youth-responsive policy-making) for higher productivity, innovative activities, decent jobs and investments that carry strong social, economic and environmental benefits.

UNDP will:

- include a solid component on youth empowerment in the new UNDP informal economy and social protection corporate offers; and
- continue to nurture multi-stakeholder partnerships with and on youth, including initiatives focusing on decent jobs for youth, youth entrepreneurship, youth employment, skills development and the role of youth as agents of change.

<sup>212</sup> Linked to conclusions 3, 4 and 9.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Include a solid component on youth empowerment in the new UNDP informal economy facility and social protection corporate offer.	June 2022	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) Regional bureaux Country offices		Initiated
1.2 Continue to nurture and scale up support to comprehensive youth economic empowerment-related initiatives, in particular through partnerships on youth economic empowerment with United Nations entities, the private sector and youth at country, regional and global levels.	June 2023	BPPS Regional bureaux Country offices		Initiated

## RECOMMENDATION 2<sup>213</sup>



**UNDP should detail its programmatic approach towards youth economic empowerment by developing a guidance document that clarifies the ambitions of UNDP in various contexts and provides practical guidance for strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation.** This instrument should adopt a cross-sectoral approach to youth economic empowerment and further accelerate its transition from smaller-scale interventions to integrated policy advisory support. The guidance should focus on the most effective interventions for each type of programmatic context.

As a step towards implementing this recommendation, UNDP needs to clearly conceptualize, and develop an integral theory of change on, youth economic empowerment or more holistically on youth empowerment across the six signature solutions. This should serve as the basis to formulate an integral response while defining the UNDP value proposition and role, including within the wider United Nations youth strategy. UNDP may wish to include in its guidance other components of youth empowerment, beyond economic empowerment, to facilitate its cross-sectoral approach.

To ensure internal coherence, this guidance should cascade into the next generation of regional programme documents so that they give greater attention to youth economic empowerment.

<sup>213</sup> Linked to conclusions 1,2,3, 5, 6 and 7.

**Management response: Accepted**

UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation and is already developing a new global guidance on youth economic empowerment.

UNDP will:

- develop a new global guidance on youth economic empowerment to support strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation; and
- roll-out the new global guidance on youth economic empowerment in at least three regions, in diverse development settings.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Develop a new global guidance on youth economic empowerment to support strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation.	December 2022	BPPS Crisis Bureau Regional bureaux Country offices		Initiated
2.2 Roll-out of the new global guidance on youth economic empowerment in at least three regions in diverse development settings.	December 2023	BPPS Crisis Bureau Regional bureaux Country offices		

### RECOMMENDATION 3<sup>214</sup>



**UNDP should take measures to ensure organization-wide coherence in its institutional architecture for youth across regions.** UNDP should ensure that regional youth focal points are in place and functional in all regions to effectively support country offices. Regional youth focal points should have the resources and systems in place to allow them to extend support and guidance on best practices to country offices in a proactive manner.

It will be key for UNDP to create a clear matrix of responsibility throughout the organization to facilitate the mainstreaming and coordination of youth employment issues across thematic clusters. It should promote accountability, synergies and cross-fertilization with different teams and clusters at country, regional and global levels for effective mainstreaming of youth economic empowerment.

UNDP should also strengthen the country focal point system, ensuring that they have the adequate resources and capabilities to be fully operational. The focal point responsibility should be part of the staff members' job descriptions. A guidance note and onboarding material are needed to ensure a clear understanding of the role and its effective implementation.

UNDP should increase the overall capacity of staff to understand and address the needs of youth. UNDP should integrate capacity-building components on youth programming into existing training programmes. These should include the development of a guidance note and toolkit on how to integrate youth in various areas of UNDP programming and operations beyond youth, peace and security.

### Management response: **Accepted**



UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation and will continue to take incremental measures to institutionalize youth further.

UNDP will:

- take relevant measures to ensure that regional and country offices identify and support a stronger network of youth focal points;
- continue to invest in youth advisory groups/sounding boards/platforms at all levels, building on the successes of the UNDP Youth Global Programme (16x16 initiative, Generation17, Youth Co: Lab, Youth Connekt, the Arab Youth Leadership Programme, etc.) and in line with the Youth 2030 strategy, to enhance UNDP programming and operations and its organizational readiness and development effectiveness.

<sup>214</sup> Linked to conclusions 1, 2, 5 and 7.



Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Confirm/reconfirm the UNDP focal point system on youth and youth economic empowerment specifically, with dedicated terms of reference, at regional and country levels, and provide onboarding packages/ learning modules on youth/ youth economic empowerment.	June 2023	Regional bureaux BPPS Bureau for Management Services (BMS)		Initiated
3.2 Continue to strengthen youth advisory groups/sounding boards/platforms at all levels to meaningfully engage young people in partnership-building and policy and programme support.	June 2023	BPPS Regional bureaux Country offices Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy (BERA)		Initiated

#### RECOMMENDATION 4<sup>215</sup>



**UNDP should systematically recognize the different needs of young women and how these intersect with age, ability, ethnicity/indigeneity, locality (rural/urban) and other markers. The organization should prioritize support that aspires to contribute to changes in social norms and that addresses the root causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination.** UNDP should go beyond setting up ratios for female participants in youth economic empowerment interventions and aim to address the differentiated needs of young women and men. Additionally, engaging youth, families, peers and communities as agents of gender transformation is key to shifting adverse social norms and drivers of gender inequalities and discrimination. To improve the effectiveness of interventions for gender equality and women's empowerment in the youth economic empowerment portfolio, UNDP should strengthen its needs assessments and front-end analyses in local contexts. Moreover, UNDP should build mechanisms to involve young women of different abilities and backgrounds from the outset to develop interventions tailored to their needs and specific challenges.

<sup>215</sup> Linked to conclusions 3 and 4.

**Management response: Accepted** 

UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation.

Youth consultations have been organized in the context of developing the new gender equality strategy, 2022–2025, which will aim to prioritize supporting change in social norms. It will integrate stronger emphasis on intersectionality that will include young women, while ensuring strengthened support for women’s economic empowerment.

UNDP will:

- develop new dedicated guidance on youth empowerment, gender equality and intersectionality, to enhance policy advisory services;
- support new programming and more systematic youth mainstreaming and gender mainstreaming in relevant tools, projects and programmes.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Update guidance on youth empowerment, gender equality and intersectionality to strengthen analysis and promote gender-transformative programming.	December 2022	BPPS Regional bureaux Country offices Crisis Bureau		
4.2 Support youth mainstreaming in relevant women’s economic empowerment tools, programmes and projects as well as gender mainstreaming in relevant youth economic empowerment tools, programmes and projects.	December 2023	BPPS Regional bureaux Country offices		

## RECOMMENDATION 5<sup>216</sup>



The renewed UNDP vision for youth economic empowerment needs to further leverage strategic partnerships to foster youth agency, considering youth as agents of change and partners for development in their own right and not merely as beneficiaries. In developing its comprehensive vision for youth economic empowerment, UNDP needs to consider a stakeholder mapping against its theory of change to identify the different types of partnerships it needs to nurture to sustainably achieve its goals in this area. This requires UNDP to take stock of its positioning, comparative advantages and value proposition as well as the trajectory it intends to take. It should design its partnership strategy accordingly to ensure synergies as well as to mobilize necessary expertise or resources. Instead of one-off project-based partnerships, UNDP should identify areas of synergy for regular and sustainable collaboration and explore the possibility of developing joint strategies and resource mobilization plans with United Nations sister agencies, civil society, the private sector and IFIs, in addition to scaling and adapting existing successful partnerships in other regions and/or countries.

Building on pilot experiences, UNDP needs to create mechanisms to channel youth input and feedback to the work of UNDP at the country level as partners and not just beneficiaries. It should also develop pilot interventions that explore new roles for youth in area such as research, planning, implementation or even M&E. UNDP should put in place measures to engage targeted youth more effectively and meaningfully from the early stages of project design. It needs to include social innovation tailored to reach disadvantaged young people, using technology that is accessible and sustainable for them. This approach should ensure that the programme is designed to fit the needs of the youth being served and foster their agency in voicing economic and social issues.

## Management response: **Accepted**



UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation.

To further leverage its unique convening power and comparative advantage and invest in youth agency, UNDP will:

- convene a UNDP youth empowerment partnership forum with a range of actors – Governments, youth, the private sector, etc. – with a view to present promising practices through which UNDP supports youth leadership in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, discuss new approaches to youth empowerment, convene partners to renew commitments and forge new alliances, and acknowledge and spotlight young people’s leadership;
- continue to invest and scale up its investment in youth leadership in projects and programmes directly, including by supporting grant programmes in the context of global, regional and country initiatives, in response to the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy and the first report of the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (2020).

<sup>216</sup> Linked to conclusions 5, 7 and 8.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Convene a UNDP youth empowerment and future generations partnership forum with a range of key actors, including Governments, young leaders, youth organizations, movements and networks.	September 2022	BPPS Regional bureaux BERA		
5.2. Enhance support to youth partnerships and youth-led initiatives for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including as part of funding window projects and grant programmes for youth.	December 2023	BPPS Regional bureaux Country offices BERA		Initiated

## RECOMMENDATION 6<sup>217</sup>



**UNDP needs to strengthen its results framework and its M&E practices for adequate tracking of youth economic empowerment results and expenditures.** UNDP needs to better conceptualize what constitutes success in this area and translate it into a corporate results framework as part of the guidance document that will allow the organization to coherently measure, monitor, report and learn from its results and contribution to youth economic empowerment, including SDGs 4.4, 8.5 or 8.6. This will be a vehicle to contribute to reporting on the broader agenda of youth empowerment and in particular UNDP commitments within the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy.

The updated results-based management system should go beyond indicators restricted to the number of participants in activities and focus on results. UNDP should consider conducting detailed baseline surveys of the target population before, during and after programme implementation to be able to examine its impact. Moreover, UNDP should follow up on progress after project completion, especially for key interventions and innovative approaches, to ascertain the longer-term economic empowerment of participants, thus building its knowledge on long-term results, sustainability and constraints. This could be achieved by increasing the coverage of youth economic empowerment interventions by decentralized evaluations.

Finally, UNDP should take steps to improve the youth marker, building on its own experience with other markers and capitalizing on the experiences of other United Nations agencies using similar markers. For the tool to be most effective, UNDP should also ensure that it is consistently applied within the organization and be subject to random quality assurance. By becoming a reliable system to track progress, this metric could support UNDP efforts on resource mobilization, accountability and youth-informed management decision-making at global, regional and country levels.

<sup>217</sup> Linked to conclusions 6 and 8.

**Management response: Accepted** 

UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation to strengthen its results framework and its monitoring and evaluation practices to enable the organization to coherently measure, monitor, report and learn from its contribution to youth economic empowerment and more broadly to youth.

For this, UNDP will take steps to:

- improve existing monitoring and evaluation tools to better take into account youth economic empowerment and youth more broadly, including the development of a UNDP-specific youth scorecard;
- strengthen the consistent application of youth leaving-no-one-behind marker in conjunction with the introduction in 2022 of Quantum, a new cloud-based enterprise resource planning system;
- support important monitoring and evaluation efforts in the context of the implementation of Youth 2030 (United Nations entity-based scorecard reporting; United Nations country team scorecard reporting; development of United Nations system-wide youth marker, etc.), the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review (which includes Youth 2030 indicators) and reporting on the common indicator (youth, peace and security frameworks with UNFPA and UN-Women) under the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, integrated results and resources framework.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
6.1 In coordination with the Youth 2030 secretariat, develop a youth scorecard specific to UNDP to measure progress on the implementation of the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy.	December 2022	BPPS		
6.2 Strengthen the consistent application of the youth leaving-no-one-behind marker through the provision of robust guidance and randomized quality assurance.	December 2023	BPPS Regional bureaux		
6.3 Support monitoring and evaluation efforts in the implementation of Youth 2030 strategy (United Nations entity scorecard, United Nations country team scorecard) and reporting on common indicators (Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, integrated results and resources framework and the 2020 quadrennial review).	December 2025	BPPS Regional bureaux		Initiated

## RECOMMENDATION 7<sup>218</sup>



The renewed UNDP vision on youth economic empowerment should be accompanied by a clearly structured resource mobilization strategy. UNDP needs to formulate a resource mobilization strategy for empowerment of youth or one dedicated to their economic empowerment. It should be framed as a viability plan to cover the means to support the ambition of UNDP for youth economic empowerment in a realistic way and to identify diversified sources of funding to adequately and predictably finance this portfolio. This exercise should be an opportunity for UNDP to reassess its scope and ambition as well as engaging in a cost-opportunity analysis of its footprint in some areas of youth economic empowerment. To support its resource mobilization efforts, UNDP could consider commissioning an advocacy study showing the costs of not addressing youth economic empowerment.

At the same time, given the limitations and unpredictability of donor funding, UNDP should engage in a discussion on the opportunity to leverage existing resources and receive additional regular resources for this area. As youth is recognized as an organizational priority, UNDP could uphold and demonstrate the institutional commitment to youth with more adequate operating funding from regular resources.

### Management response: Accepted



UNDP **fully accepts** the recommendation. The UNDP approach to youth and resource mobilization and funding needs are not limited to youth economic empowerment. UNDP therefore recognizes the need to develop a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy on youth overall. UNDP will:

- develop a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy on youth overall and will take steps to develop a renewed global corporate youth strategy/vision in line with the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and an accompanying resource mobilization strategy for youth empowerment; and
- explore opportunities to identify diversified sources of funding to adequately and predictably finance the youth portfolio (including youth economic empowerment), including opportunities to receive additional regular (core) resources for youth staff and programming, as appropriate.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
7.1 Develop a renewed global corporate UNDP youth strategy/vision with an accompanying resource-mobilization/partnership-building strategy.	December 2022	BPPS Regional bureaux Crisis Bureau BERA BMS		
7.2 Explore diversified sources of funding and mechanism to adequately and predictably finance the youth portfolio (including youth economic empowerment).	December 2022	BPPS Regional bureaux		

<sup>218</sup> Linked to conclusions 6 and 8.



# ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the IEO at:  
<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/13378>

**Annex 1.** Evaluation theory of change

**Annex 2.** Evaluation matrix

**Annex 3.** Information and protection protocols for the interviewees

**Annex 4.** Sparkblue consultation

**Annex 5.** Documents consulted

**Annex 6.** Sample interview guide

**Annex 7.** Interviewee numbers by type of stakeholders and region

**Annex 8.** Questionnaire for the participatory narrative survey

**Annex 9.** Basic statistics on the participatory narrative survey (598 stories)

**Annex 10.** Protection protocols for the Sensemaker

**Annex 11.** Sampled projects listed by selection criteria

**Annex 12.** Triangulation matrix

**Annex 13.** Survey with youth organizations



Independent  
Evaluation  
Office

United Nations Development Programme

## EVALUATION OF UNDP SUPPORT FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Independent Evaluation Office  
United Nations Development Programme  
One UN Plaza, DC1-20<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Tel. +1(646) 781 4200,  
Fax. +1(646) 781 4213

 [/www.undp.org/evaluation](http://www.undp.org/evaluation)

 [/UNDP\\_Evaluation](https://twitter.com/UNDP_Evaluation)

 [/ieoundp](https://www.facebook.com/ieoundp)

 [/evaluationoffice](https://www.youtube.com/evaluationoffice)

Evaluations for a #strongerUNDP

