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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION ECUADOR



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responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: Ecuador

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Ecuador. This is the second country level evaluation conducted for Ecuador by the Independent Evaluation Office and covers UNDP programme interventions implemented between 2019 and 2021.

Ecuador has historically experienced economic volatility, structural unemployment and social inequalities. Multiple crises and high State indebtedness have exacerbated the existing challenges of institutional weaknesses. The country is one of the first and most affected in the region by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken a heavy toll on people's lives and socioeconomic activities. Despite being one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, Ecuador's environment and natural resources have also faced critical challenges exacerbated by climate change.

The evaluation found that UNDP Ecuador is recognised for its neutrality, credibility and ability to leverage multisectoral partnerships. UNDP has expanded its programme significantly during the present cycle, strategically positioning itself in areas such as the sustainable natural resource management, the strengthening of democracy and the orderly transition of power in government. UNDP leadership and experience have enabled the Government of Ecuador to draw on the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment methodology to guide the country's recovery from the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The breadth of the environment and sustainable natural resource management portfolio and its contributions to both local and global environmental benefits, are highlighted in this programme cycle. UNDP has successfully mainstreamed gender throughout its programme and has also achieved favourable results in governance, supporting the 2021 electoral process and local and national government transitions. Results in economic development were more dispersed and in the areas of social protection and social inclusion were limited.

As UNDP Ecuador prepares for the development of a new country programme, it should focus on the socioeconomic response to COVID-19 and the reduction of poverty and inequality. UNDP should leverage its unique strategic position in the environment area to continue to expand and reinforce the linkages between sustainable development, resilience and poverty reduction in its interventions. UNDP will need to build on lessons from the pandemic response to strengthen its programme offerings and consolidate its work on governance and inclusive development. UNDP efforts on gender should focus on policy-level work to address structural barriers and the root causes of gender inequality.

I would like to thank the Government of Ecuador, the various national stakeholders, colleagues at the UNDP Ecuador country office and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean who graciously provided their time, information and support throughout this evaluation. I have every confidence that the findings, conclusions and recommendations provided herein will help to strengthen the formulation of the next UNDP country programme strategy, to achieve a more inclusive and sustainable development pathway for the people of Ecuador.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| CAF | Development Bank of Latin America |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| CFI | Coastal Fisheries Initiative |
| CONAFIPS | National Corporation for Popular Credit and Savings Finance Operatives |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019 |
| CPD | Country Programme Document |
| CSO | Civil society organization |
| DIM | Direct implementation modality |
| DPPA | Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs |
| DRR | Disaster risk reduction |
| EDT | Electoral Disputes Tribunal |
| EEQ | Empresa Eléctrica Quito |
| ENEMDU | National Survey of Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| GAD | Decentralized autonomous government |
| GBV | Gender-based violence |
| GCF | Green Climate Fund |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GEWE | Gender equality and women's empowerment |
| GIZ | German Development Agency |
| GMC | Global Sustainable Marine Value Chains project |
| GRES | Gender Results Effectiveness Scale |
| Ha. | Hectares |
| ICPE | Independent Country Programme Evaluation |
| IEO | Independent Evaluation Office |
| IFI | International financial institution |
| INEC | National Institute of Statistics and Census |
| M&E | Monitoring and evaluation |
| MAAE | Ministry for Environment and Water |
| MAG | Ministry for Agriculture and Livestock |
| MEF | Ministry for the Economy and Finance |

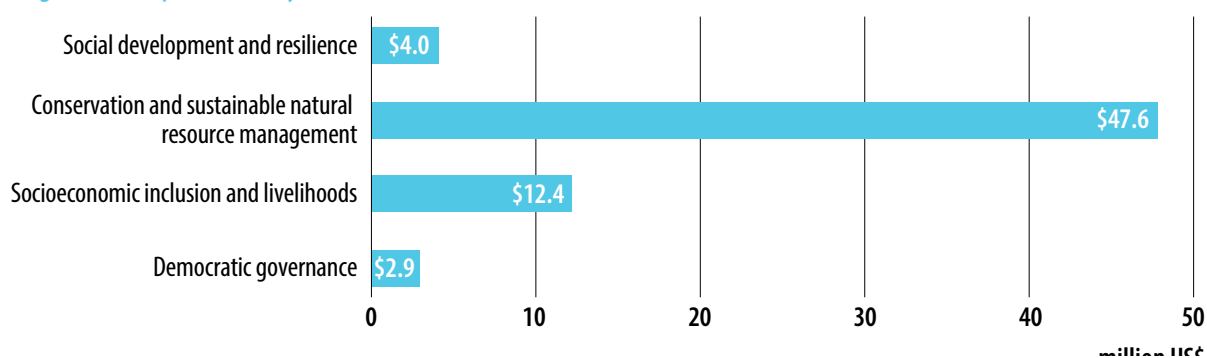
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| MRV | Monitoring, reporting and verification system |
| MSME | Micro, small and medium enterprise |
| NAP | National Adaptation Plan |
| NDC | Nationally Determined Contribution |
| NEC | National Electoral Council |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NIM | National implementation modality |
| NTFP | Non-timber forest product |
| PDNA | Post-disaster needs assessment |
| PDOT | Land Use and Development Plan |
| POP | Persistent organic pollutant |
| PPE | Personal protective equipment |
| PPVS | Wildlife Landscapes project |
| RBLAC | Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean |
| ROAR | Results-Oriented Annual Report |
| RSC-LAC | UNDP Regional Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SENESCYT | Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation |
| SENPLADES | National Secretariat of Planning and Development |
| SGP | Small Grants Programme |
| SNGR | Risk and Emergency Management Service |
| SSC | South-South cooperation |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations Refugee Agency |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

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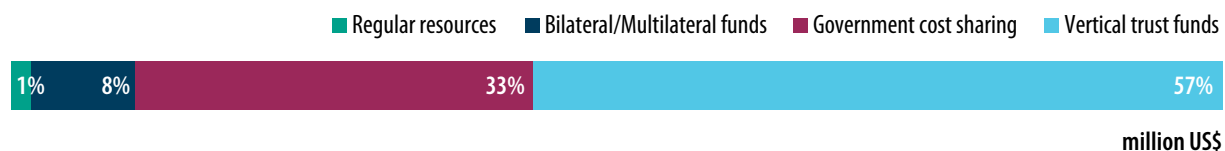
Ecuador is categorized as a high human development country with an upper-middle-income economy, and is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. Historically, the country has experienced economic volatility and structural unemployment, and has been highly dependent on oil exports. Since 2020, it has also been badly affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Socioeconomic inequality persists in the country, with significant differences in terms of poverty in rural areas, and for women and for indigenous people. Ecuador's environment and natural resources have also faced critical challenges, exacerbated by climate change. Multiple crises and high State indebtedness have exacerbated the existing challenges of institutional weakness, despite recent efforts to reform the State and its administration, such as the 2018 constitutional reform.

The current Country Programme Document 2019-22 is aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-21 and emphasizes four main areas of intervention: (1) social development and resilience; (2) conservation and sustainable natural resource management; (3) socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods; and (4) democratic governance.

Programme expenditure by thematic area, 2019-21



Country programme funding sources, 2019-21



Findings and conclusions

The evaluation found that UNDP is recognised for its neutrality, high credibility and ability to leverage multisectoral partnerships on a wide range of issues. By using its capacity to mobilize resources and its leadership to articulate joint responses, UNDP has expanded its programme and responded to emerging priorities for the country. However, by broadening its efforts across different thematic areas, UNDP may be at risk of spreading itself too thin, or being unable to ensure the sustainability of results. The structure and size of the country office is strained due to the current programme priorities and operational needs. Adjustments are ongoing, but the challenges generated by COVID-19 and the new dynamics of teleworking have impacted staff workloads significantly.

The breadth of the environment and sustainable natural resource management portfolio, and its contributions to both local and global environmental benefits, are highlighted in this programme cycle. Yet, the country context, institutional weaknesses and the long-term perspective of results call for greater efforts to monitor and ensure the sustainability of interventions. On the other hand, while UNDP work in governance achieved favourable outcomes in terms of support for strengthening democracy in Ecuador, results in economic development were more dispersed and in the area of social protection and social inclusion, limited.

UNDP effectively leveraged its comparative advantage in response to early needs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its leadership and experience have enabled the Government of Ecuador to draw on the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment methodology to guide recovery. UNDP efficiency in fund management and procurement allowed it to address urgent needs of the vulnerable population.

UNDP has successfully mainstreamed gender throughout its programme and has fostered potentially transformative initiatives, yet the complex nature of gender inequalities requires additional efforts to address the root causes and achieve more far-reaching and sustainable results.

Recommendations

To strengthen UNDP work in Ecuador in support of national development priorities, the Independent Country Programme Evaluation made five recommendations:

Recommendation 1: UNDP should continue to capitalize on its positioning and added value in Ecuador, supporting the country in the identification, mobilization and execution of resources for the implementation of strategic interventions to address poverty reduction and the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19, as well as upcoming fiscal and environmental challenges that pose a serious threat to social equity, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should adapt its office structure to the realities of the programme it implements. It should consider strengthening the programme and operations areas to allow for more realistic distribution of workloads, avoiding the risk of bottlenecks and delays, and continue to look after staff health and motivation.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should leverage its unique strategic positioning on the environment to continue expanding and reinforcing biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management approaches, climate change interventions and the linkages between sustainable development, resilience and poverty reduction.

Recommendation 4: UNDP needs to build on the lessons and opportunities from the pandemic response to strengthen its programme offer and consolidate its governance and inclusive development area for greater effectiveness.

Recommendation 5: UNDP efforts and initiatives on gender should focus on policy impact, to address the structural barriers and root causes of gender inequality and contribute to changes in women's rights, gender norms and cultural values. In this respect, the country office should strengthen its programmatic focus on poverty, social inclusion, indigenous women's rights and young women's empowerment, drawing on lessons from current work in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



This chapter presents the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation, and the methodology applied, and lays out the development context of Ecuador.

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.¹

This is the second country-level evaluation conducted by UNDP in Ecuador, after the Assessment of Development Results carried out by the IEO in 2008.² This ICPE covers the period to June 2021 of the current UNDP country programme document (CPD) (2019-22). The scope of the ICPE includes the UNDP development programme in its entirety, from all funding sources, including UNDP regular resources, donors or the Government. The ICPE also considered interventions that started in the previous programme cycle but continued into the current one, as per the evaluation terms of reference (Annex 1).

The ICPE is guided by four main evaluation questions (Box 1). It paid close attention to the UNDP response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country to assess its contribution and how the pandemic affected the planned CPD implementation. Finally, the ICPE presents findings, conclusions and recommendations, which will serve as an input to developing the new CPD for UNDP in Ecuador.

The primary audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Ecuador country office, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC), the UNDP Executive Board and the Government of Ecuador.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process, and the methodology adhered to United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.³ However, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in consultation with the country office, the ICPE team decided to conduct the evaluation remotely.

Following the terms of reference, the IEO recruited one international consultant and one national research institute to support the data collection and analysis process. The evaluation team identified the projects that made up the country programme in this cycle, and validated this with the country office (see complete

BOX 1. Evaluation questions

1. What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
 2. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
 3. To what extent has UNDP been able to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and support the country's preparedness, response and recovery process?
 4. What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP performance and, eventually, the sustainability of results?
-

¹ See <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml>.

² See <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/ecuador.shtml>.

³ See website of the United Nations Evaluation Group: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

project list in Annex 5). Subsequently, a desk review of reference material (e.g. country programmes strategies, project and programme documents, monitoring reports, audits, evaluations – see Annex 4 for full list) and a stakeholder analysis were conducted. The evaluation sought balanced representation of the different types of actors involved in the programme, including project implementing partners, government officials, beneficiary groups and development partners (including donors), United Nations agencies, civil society, private sector and academia.

The effectiveness of the UNDP country programme was analysed through an assessment of progress towards the achievement of expected outputs and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the intended CPD outcomes. To better understand UNDP performance and the sustainability of results in the country, the ICPE examined the specific factors that have influenced the programme positively and negatively. UNDP capacity to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities was also considered.

The evaluation relied on information collected from different sources, which was triangulated before the final analysis:

- A review of UNDP documentation on projects and programmes in Ecuador, decentralized evaluations,⁴ research papers and other available country-related publications. The primary documents consulted by the evaluation team are listed in Annex 4.
- An in-depth evaluation questionnaire to collect evidence on reported results. It was completed by the country office and further discussed and validated during interviews.
- An analysis of the programme outcomes and theory of change, and mapping of implemented projects against the goals set in the CPD.
- Interviews with a total of 112 stakeholders, to collect data and assess stakeholder perceptions of the scope and effectiveness of programme interventions, determine factors affecting performance and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the UNDP programme. Semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually or by phone, with a gender-balanced representation of stakeholders.⁵ A complete list of interviewees is available in Annex 3. IEO ensured that locally recruited evaluators were not put in harm's way during the pandemic.
- In line with the UNDP gender mainstreaming strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming across the country programme and operations. Gender marker data was used for the analysis of gender programme design and expenditure.⁶ Sex-disaggregated data were collected, where available, and assessed against programme outcomes. The IEO gender results effectiveness scale (GRES)⁷ was used to assess the gender-related results achieved by the programme under the different outcomes.

After the data collection stage, preliminary findings were presented virtually to the country office to collect feedback from the Resident Representative, Deputy Resident Representative and country office Operations Manager.

⁴ Ten decentralized evaluations were conducted in the period under review. The quality assessment of the consulted evaluations was: five satisfactory (One of them winner of IEO's Evaluation Award 2020), three moderately satisfactory, and two pending. <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/plans/detail/1505>.

⁵ The data collection process sought to be gender balanced. A total of 58 women (52 percent) and 54 men were interviewed.

⁶ A corporate monitoring tool used to assign a rating score to project outputs during their design phase and track planned expenditure towards outputs that contributed to achieving GEWE. The gender marker does not reflect the actual expenditures assigned to advancing GEWE. As the gender marker is assigned by project output and not project ID, a project might have several outputs with different gender markers.

⁷ The GRES classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative, gender blind, gender targeted, gender responsive, and gender transformative.

The draft ICPE report was quality-assured by an internal peer-review process, and external review process, before being submitted to the country office and RBLAC for identification of factual errors and comments. The revised report was then shared with the Government and other national partners for comments. A final stakeholder debriefing was held over videoconference, which brought together representatives of the major stakeholders of the programme. The event offered an additional opportunity to discuss the results of the evaluation and ways forward for UNDP in the next cycle, including the management response presented by the country office.

Evaluation limitations

The main limitation of the study was the difficulty in gaining access to stakeholders and capturing the insights and nuances that are traditionally achieved through fieldwork, but can be lost in the virtual modality. The ICPE data collection process was conducted alongside the presidential electoral process, before the new Government took office. This overlap with the transitional period brought difficulties in securing some interviews, due to competing priorities of partners in the handover process. The evaluation team mitigated this situation by diversifying the types of actors to be interviewed. Difficulties in reaching stakeholders were further exacerbated by a surge of COVID-19 cases in the country and new mobility restrictions which made it impossible to carry out in-person visits to project sites on the ground or reach and interview groups of local beneficiaries. To mitigate this, the evaluation team broadened the scope and depth of its secondary data review and expanded the consultation period to accommodate mitigation measures, although not all types of information could be collected remotely.

1.3 Country context

The Republic of Ecuador is an upper-middle-income economy,⁸ with an estimated population of 17.7 million in 2021,⁹ 64 percent of whom reside in urban areas.¹⁰ Its Human Development Index of 0.759 is lower than the regional average for Latin America.¹¹ Nevertheless, it belongs to the category of high human development countries, ranking 86 out of 189 countries and territories in 2019.

Historically, Ecuador has experienced economic volatility, social inequality and structural unemployment, and its economy has been highly dependent on oil exports. Global oil prices fell by 70 percent between mid-2014 and early 2016, causing a severe impact on Ecuador as revenues plunged and public spending and investment declined.¹² The devastating 2016 earthquake deepened the country's economic recession.¹³ Since then, economic recovery has been weak and the employment market has deteriorated. In 2020, the economy was hit by a decline in the worldwide oil price and the COVID-19 pandemic, which generated an unprecedented crisis reflected by a 7.8 percent drop in its gross domestic product.¹⁴

⁸ The World Bank. Data for Ecuador. <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=EC-XI>.

⁹ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Ecuador (INEC). <https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/estadisticas>.

¹⁰ United Nations data for Ecuador as of 2019. <https://data.un.org/en/iso/ec.html>.

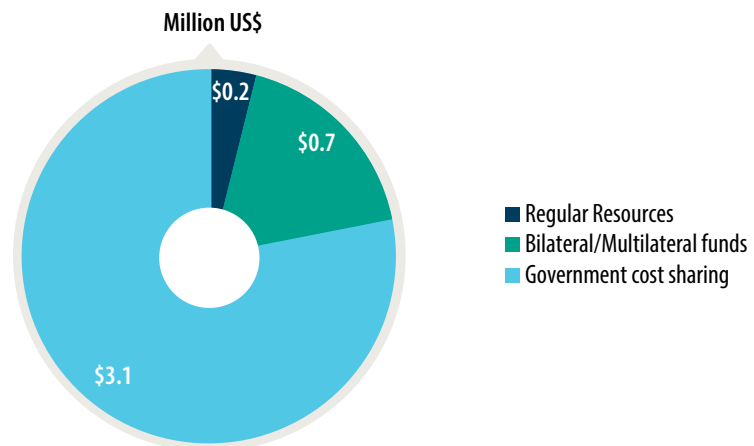
¹¹ Human Development Report 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ECU#>.

¹² The World Bank Group (2018), 'The 2014-2016 Oil Price Collapse in Retrospect'.

¹³ In April 2016, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 hit the country, generating an estimated loss of 22,000 jobs, and the estimated cost of reconstruction in the affected areas was approximately \$2,250 million.

¹⁴ Central Bank of Ecuador, Press Bulletin, 31 March 2021. <https://www.bce.fin.ec/index.php/boletines-de-prensa-archivo/item/1421-la-pandemia-incidio-en-el-crecimiento-2020-la-economia-ecuatoriana-decrecio-7-8>.

FIGURE 5. Expenditure by fund category for Social development and resilience (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data of 2021 as of 21 July 2021.

Finding 1. Social protection: UNDP has capitalized on strategic partnerships to provide technical support and advice to the Government’s efforts to tackle informal youth employment and strengthen its social protection system. One notable value addition was the use of the recently-established UNDP Acceleration Lab team in Ecuador to pilot innovative methodologies and solutions to reduce labour informality and promote youth enrolment in social protection schemes. However, while these different interventions create the enabling conditions for the country’s social protection systems to become more inclusive, they have not yet ensured effective access to social protection for traditionally excluded groups.

This outcome aspires to guarantee priority groups and historically-excluded populations effective access to high-quality social and protection services. UNDP contributions mainly focused on the creation of a more favourable institutional environment to improve the reach of national non-contributory social protection programmes.

UNDP has collaborated with the International Labour Organization and UN Women to implement the ‘Expansion of the Social Protection System for Young Men and Women in Informal Situations’ joint project in Quito, Guayaquil, Loja and Machala. This aims to strengthen the integration of youth into the social protection system and grant them access to decent work. Implemented since January 2020, the joint project has developed a contribution-based scheme to incorporate young people into the social security system under the current social protection programme in each of the target municipalities. According to interviews, this model is paving the way for decentralized autonomous governments (GADs) to have a roadmap for the economic inclusion of youth, including migrants.

The project also contributed to the compilation of international good practices to allow Ecuador to extend social security coverage to informal workers. Furthermore, with the support of the Central Bank of Ecuador, the project facilitated the development and promotion of a financial inclusion strategy targeting informal workers in the four pilot areas. There are hopes that, once the strategy is tested, it can be scaled up at national level through integration into the next National Development Plan.

The country office engaged the Acceleration Lab to incorporate innovative elements into the project, including a Digital Prototype to help young people identify misleading job advertisements by applying design thinking methodology.⁴⁷ The Acceleration Lab also conducted experiments to increase youth enrolment into social security, using behavioural science to assess whether the design of communication messages responded to the cognitive biases of their intended audience. These experiences are expected to contribute to more effective communication tools to stimulate the enrolment of young informal workers in social protection services. The Acceleration Lab also launched the Innovation Challenge ‘For more informality data’, based on collective intelligence and co-creation, conducting a series of paper-based surveys (to ensure the participation of informal workers) to generate a common data management model, and using an open data scheme to ensure democratic use of the data.⁴⁸ However, as these experiments are recent, it is unclear what type of follow-up will be done.

UNDP has been funded by the Government (through a World Bank loan⁴⁹) to advise the Social Registry Unit on expanding and improving the quality of its social registration database.⁵⁰ This database identifies and targets government cash transfers included in the country’s non-contributory social policy, and had not been updated since 2014. In alliance with the World Bank, UNDP assisted with the technical verification and certification of the expansion of the social registry database, first to 1.2 million, and then 2.4 million people. The social registry is the public body of information on potential beneficiaries for better targeting of social programmes such as cash transfers. In this case, the update included a reformulation of the algorithm to better identify and target cash transfer beneficiaries. The intervention is a building block to increase the access of vulnerable populations to social programmes, in line with the outcome sought by the UNDP CPD. However, the full realization of this outcome would have required greater interaction with the institutions providing social programmes.

Finding 2. Resilience: UNDP has worked to strengthen risk and emergency management capacity, with results at local and national government levels. Support to recovery policies was provided through the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) methodology, which has been instrumental in assessing the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. However, there is limited clarity so far on how this will be transformed into a well-funded, comprehensive socioeconomic response plan to address identified needs.

Given the context of Ecuador as a disaster hotspot, UNDP contributions to capacity-building for resilience to natural disasters are relevant, both to the national Government with upstream interventions, and to local governments in different downstream interventions.

The PDNA project was part of a global initiative, whose objective was to contribute to building the resilience of countries after disasters caused by natural hazards by “*strengthening the capacities to assess, plan, implement and monitor recovery processes.*”⁵¹ UNDP developed guidelines adapted to the Ecuadorian context, trained staff of the Risk and Emergency Management Service (SNGR) and in conjunction with SNGR, the World Bank, several United Nations agencies and the National Planning Secretariat, carried out

⁴⁷ The UNDP Acceleration Lab Ecuador is designed to explore new and innovative mechanisms to: i) host the design and implementation of proposed public policy instruments, strengthen data generation mechanisms, explore non-traditional sources of information; ii) launch an innovation challenge with the support of the Alliance for Entrepreneurship and Innovation; iii) promote SSC to accelerate the formalization of young workers; and iv) support the development of a sustainable financing model.

⁴⁸ Innovation Challenge ‘Por más datos de informalidad’: <https://www.ec.undp.org/content/ecuador/es/home/blog/2021/pensando-fuera-de-la-caja-reto-de-innovacion-por-mas-datos-de-in.html>.

⁴⁹ Within the World Bank interests in improving social protection policy in Ecuador, as part of its loan to the country.

⁵⁰ Implemented via the UNDP Engagement Facility, which provides a rapid and flexible response mechanism to support upstream policy results, evaluation and assessments, crisis responses and the testing of innovations with scale-up potential.

⁵¹ The PDNA methodology is an international standard promoted by the United Nations, EU and World Bank, used globally by countries and cooperation entities as a common reference to articulate post-disaster actions with national actors.

the assessment of the 2018 winter phase using the PDNA methodology.⁵² As a result of this exercise, UNDP proposed the creation of an operational post-disaster recovery unit as part of SNGR. The approval is still pending, mainly due to multiple changes of authority and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, faced with the first effects of COVID-19 in Ecuador, SNGR recommended that the National Emergency Operations Committee adapt and use the PDNA methodology. The UNDP role as technical coordinator and advisor was agreed with the Technical Planning Secretariat "*Planifica Ecuador*", due to its previous experience with the methodology.

Interviewees confirmed the UNDP leadership in this process, and its contribution to coordinating the assistance and technical accompaniment of United Nations agencies, the World Bank and European Union (EU) in the elaboration of the PDNA COVID-19 Socioeconomic Assessment. This can be considered a good example of the integrator role of UNDP within the United Nations System. A first exercise was carried out between March and May 2020, in coordination with the Sectoral Cabinets of Social, Economic and Productive, Natural Resources, Habitat and Infrastructure and Security, including training over 100 officials from national government institutions. The result was an analysis of the human and macroeconomic impact of the pandemic, as well as an assessment of the needs and strategies of different national sectors for the first 12 months of the COVID-19 response.⁵³ During the first half of 2021, an update to the needs assessment until December 2020 was made. The results of this second PDNA exercise are intended to be a critical assessment for the new Government to implement actions to decelerate the crisis caused by COVID-19 among the country's most vulnerable populations.⁵⁴ The PDNA results have reinforced the need to organise a comprehensive socioeconomic response to address the effects of the crisis in all development areas. This will require a significant amount of investment, and there is little evidence of the extent to which the assessment process has contributed to identifying or securing new funds.⁵⁵

In parallel, UNDP has demonstrated capacity for rapid response to crises at local level. Counterparts interviewed indicated that this has been possible due to the quality of UNDP technical assistance and close relationship with the public sector at subnational level. The '*Population Resilience*' project provided effective and efficient assistance to populations affected by the September 2018 earthquake in the centre of the country (Chillanes). In particular, 12 rural communities improved their resilience to natural disasters by activating community committees and maintaining the drinking water network. The project was able to adapt its activities to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and leverage opportunities for remote training to expand its scope beyond the planned communities, providing radio training on seismic-resistant construction. Although sustainability elements were not considered in the design of the project, the engagement of citizens (especially women and youth) and local organizations of beneficiary communities was key to the sustainability of project results, and communities were able to replicate the knowledge gained from UNDP interventions through first response brigades and community emergency committees.

UNDP activated three lines of action to support affected communities in response to the Sangay volcano emergency: 1) an evaluation of drinking water systems with the collaboration of local communities; 2) delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect citizens against ash fall; and 3) protection of livelihoods through delivery of vaccination kits and vitamin salts for farm animals in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG).⁵⁶

⁵² PDNA Rainy season 2018- 2019 in the coastal region.

⁵³ Economic and productive, social, natural resources, habitat and infrastructure, security and cross-cutting sectors and subsectors.

⁵⁴ See https://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2021/06/INFORME_PDNA_COVID-19_ECUADOR_WEB.pdf.

⁵⁵ At the time of data collection and analysis for this evaluation the new National Development Plan had not yet been formulated.

⁵⁶ The most affected areas were the communities of Guamote district during September, October and November 2020.

Finding 3. Research for social development: UNDP collaboration with SENESCYT has facilitated effective implementation of the National Research Fund “*Inédita*” and financing of research and development initiatives aligned to the SDGs. It is unclear, however, how this specific project (which accounts for nearly 80 percent of the Outcome budget) will produce the planned output- and outcome-level changes.

Inédita is a grant-making mechanism to finance universities and research institutions for research and/or technological development projects that contribute to the development of the country. With the administrative support of UNDP, *Inédita* received nearly 500 research and development proposals from universities and research institutions, of which 52 were selected and are being financed.⁵⁷ This NIM project is entirely funded by SENESCYT and, with a budget of approximately \$6 million, represents almost 80 percent of the budget for this outcome.

According to interviews and documents reviewed, the UNDP contribution and added value was primarily administrative. Prior to UNDP involvement, *Inédita* faced a significant administrative issue, in that it couldn’t utilize all of the funds allocated by the Ministry for Economy and Finance (MEF) within a single fiscal year, and unused funds were recovered by MEF. This significantly affected implementation of grantee initiatives that spread over multiple fiscal years. By working with UNDP as fund manager, *Inédita* has been implemented more efficiently, with funding retained over fiscal years, ensuring more regular and predictable disbursements to grantees.⁵⁸

In addition to this much needed administrative assistance, UNDP supported the elaboration of guidance documents for SENESCYT to further formalize the functioning of *Inédita* technical committees and streamline the grantee selection process. According to the programme document, UNDP is expected to evaluate its support of *Inédita* to identify good practices and formulate recommendations to improve the programme.

As research capabilities are fundamental to the development of the country, this support can be seen as highly relevant for the development of Ecuador, most notably since grants were made to initiatives that could contribute to the SDGs. However, given the broad nature of the research initiatives funded through *Inédita*, this project is not strictly aligned to the CPD outcome statement or the goal of strengthening Ecuador’s social protection system. In terms of sustainability, this intervention has not sought to address the structural issues that would eventually allow SENESCYT to manage the *Inédita* budget without the risk of having to return unspent funds to MEF.

At CPD level, despite the plausible contribution of the project to the academic, social and productive sectors, the evaluators note that the design of this outcome, in which a single project accounts for nearly 80 percent of the budget, raises questions for the plausibility of the outcome-level theory of change. This finding is further supported by the fact that there is only one broad output under this outcome statement, which does not distinguish between the supply and demand ends of social protection programmes, or identify and target clearly defined vulnerable populations.

⁵⁷ Proposals received covered different themes: Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change (26 percent), Agriculture and Livestock (17 percent), Wellbeing and Health (16 percent), Inclusive Territories (14 percent), Energy and Materials (11 percent), ICTs (10 percent), and Industrial Development (7 percent).

⁵⁸ Despite the adverse economic and budgetary conditions of the country that were further exacerbated by the pandemic, UNDP support has allowed *Inédita* to execute almost 100 percent of the resources allocated to higher education and research institutions.

Finding 4. GBV: UNDP has made effective use of its partnerships with other United Nations agencies in the country to generate products and tools that enable the State of Ecuador to improve its capacity to prevent, sanction and eradicate violence against women. The enforcement and impact of these is not yet evident in terms of results, but UNDP and partners have the opportunity to continue to strengthen this work in coordination with CSOs.

In response to preoccupying rates of violence against women,⁵⁹ exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,⁶⁰ UNDP has been paying increased attention to the eradication of GBV. The country office implemented the regional *'Development of State capacities to prevent and respond to GBV'* programme in Ecuador,⁶¹ funded by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF). UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and were invited to participate in the programme steering committee to ensure United Nations coordination. Notably, UNDP assisted the Human Rights Secretariat to develop a management model for implementation of the national system for the prevention and eradication of GBV. This management model is fully aligned to the 2018 Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, and is the basis of an interinstitutional coordination mechanism that brings together national and local actors engaged in the prevention and eradication of GBV.⁶² UNDP also supported the development of a costing model that, if adopted by national authorities, should ensure the sustainability of the management model as it proposes tools to finance the implementation of a locally decentralized protection system. Furthermore, the country office was able to estimate the cost of shelter accommodation for women victims of violence and their dependents, and develop a social protection package for the dependents of victims of femicide.⁶³

Both the management and costing models have been instrumental in securing financing from the global Spotlight Initiative for Ecuador. The Spotlight Initiative is funded by the EU, and implemented by UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA, to work at policy level to prevent GBV, and UNDP is supporting pillars two and five of the Initiative.⁶⁴ UNDP has already committed resources for several activities, namely: (i) to design the national public policy document for comprehensive reparations for survivors of GBV; (ii) to launch the national observatory on violence against women, and develop its governance and management model; and (iii) to implement a single registry system for GBV. All three are considered relevant by this evaluation due to the absence of data on GBV in Ecuador. No results have been reported yet, due to the early stages of the project implementation.

Similarly, in the absence of data on the effects of Venezuelan migration to Ecuador, the country office has been collaborating with RBLAC, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to analyse the situation of Venezuelan women in Ecuador, within the framework of the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.⁶⁵ The study identified that Venezuelan women have significant needs for *"income generation, assistance in obtaining necessary documents, food, medical aid and protection from insecurity and violence."*⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Seven out of 10 women have experienced violence in their lifetime. Socioeconomic assessment PDNA COVID-19 Ecuador, 2021.

⁶⁰ In 2020, 77 murders of women were reported nationally, 14 percent more than the 66 in 2019. Source: Ibid.

⁶¹ Implemented in Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, to improve the response of states to GBV in prevention, care and rehabilitation.

⁶² It defines the national system for the prevention and eradication of violence against women. National Assembly Republic of Ecuador, 2018. https://www.igualdad.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2018/05/ley_prevenir_y_erradicar_violencia_mujeres.pdf

⁶³ Human Rights Secretariat. Ecuador. <https://www.derechoshumanos.gob.ec/presentacion-del-modelo-de-costeo-de-iniciativas-frente-a-la-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-y-las-ninas>.

⁶⁴ Pillar 2) National and subnational systems and institutions plan, fund and offer evidence-based programs to prevent and respond to GBV and harmful practices; Pilar 5) Quality data, disaggregated and comparable regarding different forms of GBV and harmful practices, compiled, analysed and used according to international standards to inform laws, policies and programmes.

⁶⁵ UNDP, "Reinventing Yourself along the way: Refugee and Migrant Women of Venezuela A study of their conditions and access to livelihoods in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in the framework of the response to Venezuelans".

⁶⁶ See <https://www.ec.undp.org/content/ecuador/es/home/blog/2020/-la-migracion-de-mujeres-venezolanas-y-los-desafios-para-promove.html>.

UNDP Ecuador provided technical assistance to fight GBV in politics and during elections by supporting the reform of the electoral law, and implemented several women’s empowerment interventions through the ‘Assistance to the National Electoral Council (NEC)’ project.⁶⁷ Training for women candidates was conducted in collaboration with UN Women, alongside media and social media monitoring to combat gender-based political violence and the production of outreach materials and reports. However, there is still little evidence on the impact of these efforts during the election campaign. In addition, the need for more work with civil society has been identified, to achieve greater sustainability in combating gender-based political violence.⁶⁸

2.2 Outcome 2: Conservation and sustainable natural resource management

CPD Outcome 2: By 2022, Ecuador has strengthened its normative, political and institutional frameworks to improve sustainable, participatory and gender-focused natural resource management, promoting more responsible production and consumption patterns, in a context of climate change.

Related outputs:

OUTPUT 2.1. Instruments and/or mechanisms generated or implemented nationally or locally to sustainably manage natural resources, environmental pollution, mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation and transition to more sustainable productive systems.

OUTPUT 2.2. Actions of sustainable forest conservation and management implemented and good practices in sustainable supply chains.

A total of 24 projects, with 26 project outputs, were implemented under this outcome, with a budget of \$75.9 million and expenditure of \$47.6 million.⁶⁹ This is the most significant outcome in terms of expenditure (corresponding to 71 percent of total programme expenditure).⁷⁰ This portfolio was mainly nationally implemented, with UNDP support services. Eleven projects (73 percent of expenditure) used NIM modality, while ten (20 percent of expenditure) used DIM, and three (7 percent expenditure) had other types of implementation. Vertical Trust Funds have been the primary source of funding, covering approximately 80 percent of expenditure (\$38 million). This outcome has mainly been funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) (42 percent of expenditure), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Trust Fund (37 percent of expenditure) and the Quito Electric Company (15 percent of expenditure).⁷¹

⁶⁷ National Election Council, Government of Ecuador. See finding #16 for more details about the project and its results.

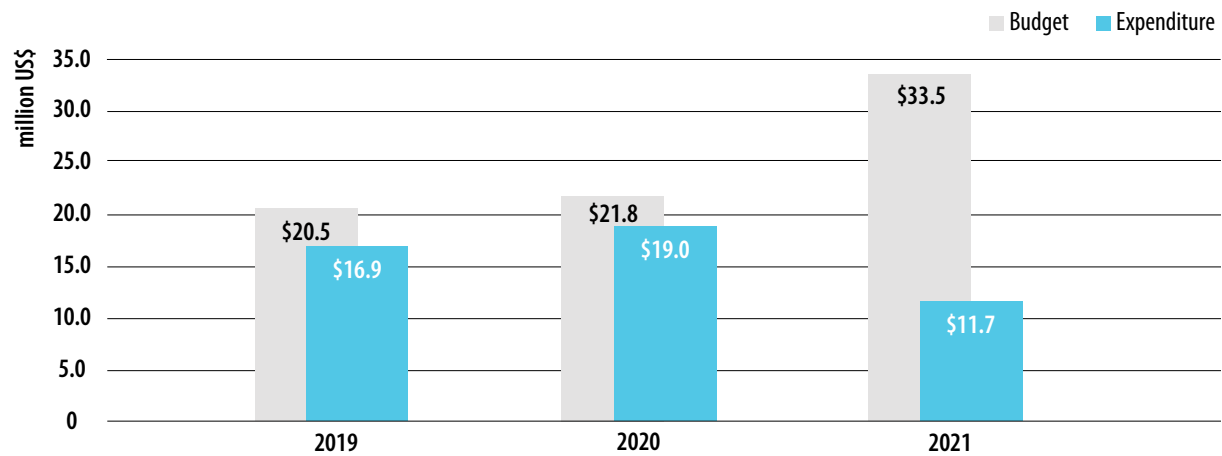
⁶⁸ UNDP (2021) Midterm evaluation of UNDP Ecuador Country Programme Outcome 4, 2019-22. <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/10051>.

⁶⁹ Two additional projects were in preparation at the time of the evaluation.

⁷⁰ The financial resources correspond to the period: 2019 to 21 July 2021.

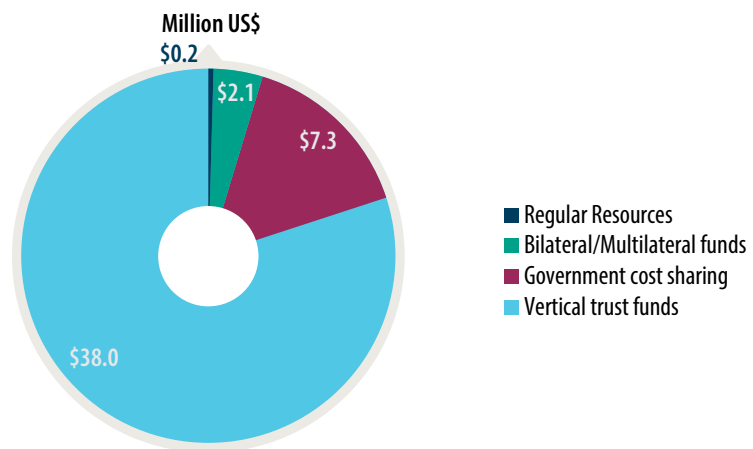
⁷¹ Quito Electric Company, incorporated in Quito in 1955, produces and supplies electric power for the Ecuador’s capital city and towns of the provinces of Pichincha and Napo.

FIGURE 6. Evolution of budget and expenditure for Conservation and sustainable natural resource management (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021.

FIGURE 7. Expenditure by fund category for Conservation and sustainable natural resource management (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021.

Finding 5. Biodiversity conservation: UNDP has contributed to terrestrial biodiversity and priority ecosystem conservation through institutional strengthening, support for the fulfilment of obligations under international conventions, concrete *in* and *ex situ* actions for conservation priority species, and support to the Protected Areas System. However, the absence of a clear pathway to results, and shortcomings in the indicators and sustainability measures, have made it difficult to confirm whether the effects of interventions will be long-lasting.

UNDP has contributed to biodiversity conservation in Ecuador through different conservation strategies. Interventions focusing on a range of complementary issues have been implemented, including the conservation of: priority species ('conservation objects'); ecosystems and species within protected areas;

and species and habitats in productive areas through the ‘bio-corridor protection and landscape’ approach (see finding 6). In addition, UNDP has contributed to compliance with the various obligations derived from international treaties on the environment.

The project with the most clearly defined conservation objective was the ‘*Amphibian*’ project, which aimed to safeguard this globally significant biodiversity group by implementing integrated emergency actions to conserve the diversity of amphibians and use their genetic resources in a sustainable way.⁷² The evaluation considers the amphibian project to be highly relevant and innovative. It has pioneered concrete solutions to implement the Nagoya Protocol, while generating scientific knowledge on the genome, conservation and laboratory manipulation. The project succeeded in setting up two conservation areas through GADs, establishing wildlife management plans and protocols for access to information and the community-led and participatory management of genetic resources. It also contributed to facilitating access to information and creating a more favourable environment for research around active compounds derived from the skin secretion of Ecuadorian amphibians,⁷³ with potential applications in biomedicine, a contribution that was confirmed by the project evaluation.⁷⁴

The ‘*Wildlife Landscapes*’ project (PPVS) contributed to the elaboration of action plans for the conservation of the white-lipped peccary, Ecuadorian primates and the Andean condor, the latter with a component for captive breeding.⁷⁵ The UNDP contribution to biodiversity conservation in the PPVS project emphasized strengthening the National Protected Areas System and declaring new protected areas. Together with the Ministry for Environment and Water (MAAE) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UNDP contributed to the declaration of one Ramsar site and three Conservation and Sustainable Use Areas, covering 500,000 ha. of new conservation areas. At policy level, PPVS contributed to the inclusion of new policy instruments on wildlife within the new Organic Environmental Code,⁷⁶ and others within MAAE and the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES).⁷⁷ PPVS did not achieve the inclusion of regulations on conservation, access and sustainable use of biodiversity and environmental planning in Ecuador’s Development Plan. However, aligned with a landscape approach, it did contribute to the generation of several district-level plans that incorporated specific measures to reduce pressure on wildlife through municipal decrees and community-level agreements to reduce hunting.⁷⁸

While these projects have worked towards increasing the effectiveness of wildlife conservation measures, they share common weaknesses. One is in their monitoring systems, as results were not reported in relation to the populations of target species. In the case of PPVS, for instance, indigenous communities were supported to increase their sources of income to reduce hunting, and agreements were signed with them for this purpose, but only proxy indicators were reported to track progress. Another is the uncertain

⁷² Project id 86955.

⁷³ i) Research and Conservation Plan for Amphibians of Ecuador and its Action Plan; ii) monitoring (interconnection of computer platforms with MAAE and FO/CJ); iii) increase of information on their genome, reproduction and properties and updating of their status (Red List of Amphibians); and iv) institutional strengthening for their study (installation of laboratory at NGO IKIAM).

⁷⁴ UNDP Midterm review. *Conservation of Ecuadorian Amphibians biodiversity of and Sustainable Use of its Genetic Resources* Project.

⁷⁵ Project ID 75233.

⁷⁶ Elements included in the Organic Environmental Code proposal: The secondary rules required to implement the provisions on the sanctioning power of MAAE and the secondary rules with respect to the conservation, management and sustainable use of urban and wild fauna.

⁷⁷ Technical guidelines on wildlife management for use in development plans and land use planning were elaborated and submitted to SENPLADES to create a guide of environmental criteria to be considered in the PDOTs.

⁷⁸ Local GADs incorporated specific measures to reduce pressures on wildlife: Mejía (regulates and controls urban fauna), Nabón, Oña, Santa Isabel and Saraguro (conservation of the Andean Condor), Cotacachi and Carchi (ACUS declaration) and Francisco de Orellana (fisheries management). In addition, wildlife management in GAD El Oro (Tembladera landscape) and GAD Loja (Sangay-Podocarpus corridor).

sustainability of the outcomes achieved. Exit strategies were developed late and not disseminated, and the project did not establish actions to verify the degree to which protected areas contributed to the conservation objective.

As part of two global projects, UNDP supported MAAE to fulfil Ecuador's obligations to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)⁷⁹ and the Nagoya Protocol.⁸⁰ Within this, UNDP supported the formulation of the 'Sixth National Biodiversity Report',⁸¹ providing technical support for the evaluation of the National Biodiversity Strategy, which assessed the country's main achievements and challenges towards the CBD objectives. UNDP also helped to assess compliance with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets⁸² and the Plant Species Conservation Strategy.⁸³ This project was innovative for including geospatial data, and notable for being participatory and sensitive to gender and intercultural issues.⁸⁴ In addition, UNDP strengthened MAAE capacity for compliance with the Nagoya Protocol by supporting the development of the national legal framework for Access and Benefit Sharing, with regulations for research and the protection of indigenous knowledge.

Finding 6. Landscape approach: UNDP contributed to strengthening the legal framework and institutional environment for land use planning for biodiversity conservation, sustainable natural resource management and emission reductions. To reinforce national ownership, sustainability must be underpinned, and results frameworks improved to strengthen evidence of progress towards the ultimate goal of global environmental benefits for conservation and poverty reduction.

An additional biodiversity conservation approach implemented by UNDP covers the environmentally-friendly management of landscapes. This requires a complementary approach, considering that globally important species exist outside of protected areas. Thus, promoting landscape management of bio-corridors that connect strategic conservation areas across productive zones is expected to generate global benefits for conservation, while reducing carbon emissions and promoting the sustainable management of productive systems for poverty reduction. Documents reviewed and interviewees highlighted that the implementation of this approach is helping Ecuador to reach its local and global environmental objectives. This approach, fully aligned with the MAAE 'Connectivity for Conservation Strategy', was implemented by UNDP during the current programme cycle through various projects, including the 'PROAmazonia' programme, PPVS and the Small Grants Programme (SGP) phases 6 and 7.⁸⁵

The most significant intervention implemented by UNDP using this approach is *PROAmazonia*, encompassing three projects (two funded by GCF⁸⁶ and one by GEF⁸⁷). This programme was designed and implemented through a strategic alliance with MAAE and MAG. The programme outcomes aimed to address deforestation and its causes, and promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable and integrated natural resource management in productive zones and bio-corridors. The ultimate goal of the programme was to benefit the global environment and, simultaneously, reduce poverty.

⁷⁹ Project ID 106014.

⁸⁰ Project ID 95244.

⁸¹ See <https://chm.cbd.int/database/record?documentID=241321>.

⁸² See <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets>.

⁸³ See <http://inabio.biodiversidad.gob.ec/vi-informe-nacional-de-biodiversidad>.

⁸⁴ The project included a plan for gender participation. It also had a strong participatory approach and organized consultation through workshops, interviews and focus groups throughout the country with State institutions, NGOs, indigenous organizations e.g. from Amazonia, and universities. At least five groups of women were specifically consulted and all the workshops were gender sensitive. It also included interaction with other UNDP projects that have field interventions (SGP, *PROAmazonia*, Global Commodities). The final document included goals of priority conservation objects and ecosystems as well as sustainable management including communities.

⁸⁵ MAAE (2013), "Estrategia de gestión para conectividad con fines de conservación". Acuerdo Ministerial 105. 24 Octubre 2013.

⁸⁶ Project ID 101841.

⁸⁷ Project ID 100780.

The results achieved so far have contributed to all of the planned outcome and output indicators, but with different levels of progress. In terms of biodiversity conservation, the increase in protected areas and reduction of deforestation, PROAmazonia reports the conservation of 159,557 ha. of forest through 'Socio Bosque', a separate MAAE programme. At a smaller level, SGP also reported a contribution to conservation with Socio Bosque co-financing. PROAmazonia also contributed to protecting 393,372 ha. of forest through REDD+ actions and watershed management in the Amazon. UNDP also reported an additional contribution to forest control, with the improvement of six forest control points, the ongoing restoration of 11,023 ha. of forest for various plantations in the Amazon region, and the restoration of 2,422 ha. of dry forest in the south of the country.

UNDP also intervened at institutional level, for example updating 'Land Use and Development Plans' (PDOTs) to respond to climate change and sustainable production needs, to enhance governance and planning in 28 GADs.⁸⁸ The GADs interviewed expressed satisfaction with the support received for developing PDOTs, and considered the inclusion of maps and geographic information a relevant improvement in their planning outputs. Similarly, UNDP contributed to community-level planning processes for the Amazon region, supporting the preparation of four updated Life Plans, fully endorsed by communities, incorporating climate change criteria.⁸⁹

Also at community level, UNDP fostered transition to sustainable production systems to improve community wellbeing. To December 2020, PROAmazonia reported 14 production prototypes based on non-timber forest products (NTFPs)⁹⁰ and 18 bio-entrepreneurship projects⁹¹ for NTFPs involving 4,730 beneficiaries, with priority for women and indigenous peoples. The programme also trained 2,500 producers in its field school methodology, and developed a sustainable production certification process, a regional action plan for palm, and the construction of farm maps to support the internal organization of the territory (covering 1,210 ha. of palm and 370 ha. of coffee and cocoa). With support from MAG, farm management plans have been developed for 669 ha. of protected forest in the Amazon.⁹² However, progress in the transition to sustainable production systems has been assessed as the weakest of the programme outcomes.⁹³ In addition, the reported impact of these interventions on business results was limited, due to the economic crisis faced by the country.⁹⁴

Among the challenges identified for the implementation of *PROAmazonia*, evaluators noted difficulties arising from the different organizational cultures of MAAE and MAG. In addition, high staff turnover in the ministries undermined ownership and led to delays. Documents reviewed and interviews suggested that this was partly mitigated by the selection of NIM modality for implementation, with support from UNDP services, and the high capacity of the project management unit.

PPVS was also implemented using the landscape approach, as the first attempt to apply the strategy to promote the conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas. This produced important results on biodiversity conservation through working on specific objects of conservation and protected areas, as described in finding 5. However, it had limited results in productive areas due to a lack of professionals with

⁸⁸ Six provincial, 17 district and five parish.

⁸⁹ See <https://twitter.com/PROAmazoniaEC/status/1321120912889053184?s=20>; and <https://twitter.com/PROAmazoniaEC/status/1305991709919186950?s=20>.

⁹⁰ E.g. *Sinchi sacha*, beekeeping, medicinal soaps to combat COVID, shampoo, forest pasture, reforestation.

⁹¹ 17 selected through public tender and one as part of the agreement with the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja.

⁹² Contributions were made to the brand *Premium&Sustainable* (for sustainable production), adherence to the Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock Production was strengthened and a new RSPO certification standard for palm oil palm at the jurisdictional level.

⁹³ UNDP, Midterm evaluation of 'Priming financial and land-use planning instruments to reduce emissions from deforestation Project'.

⁹⁴ See finding 12 for details on how *PROAmazonia* used UNDP methodologies for initiating and growing businesses.

the required expertise. Nevertheless, it is a very important example worth learning from, as it integrates different conservation strategies and has the strongest alignment with environmental policies and donor mandates.

SGP phases 6 and 7⁹⁵ were also implemented with a landscape approach, aiming to create and consolidate bio-corridors for ecological conservation and climate change mitigation under the concept of 'connectivity'. Through the integration of sustainable production and association strengthening, it has sought holistic approaches to build resilience and achieve global benefits. Phase 6 resulted in the establishment of 33 community enterprises in ten bio-corridors, and phase 7 achieved 70 enterprises within 12 bio-corridors, reaching 270 communities. The projects reported bio-enterprises, sustainable production and improved marketing to generate income for communities, with the aim of contributing to poverty reduction and community empowerment to ensure social sustainability. The reporting on contributions to global benefits for conservation and climate change has some limitations. SGP has generated community maps of the bio-corridors, including forest remnants or protected areas, reporting the number of hectares and types of ecosystems protected or restored (i.e. mangrove) and even certain species,⁹⁶ some considered of global importance, but progress on the conservation of those species or ecosystems were not reported as results of the project. In some bio-corridors, the protection of water sources, productive species or conservation is reported through the *Socio Bosque* programme.

Overall, the complexity of ecosystems and the social and environmental changes sought, coupled with some weaknesses in indicators and activities to test the hypothesis linking community actions to conservation, creates difficulties in attributing progress towards the ultimate goals of global environmental benefits and poverty reduction. In addition, the monitoring and communication of project progress to stakeholders have not always been adequate. This, together with high staff turnover, has led to implementation difficulties and delays, jeopardising results and the programme's long-term vision.⁹⁷

Finding 7. International waters: UNDP has promoted spaces for dialogue with bordering countries to improve governance mechanisms for binational water basins, and strengthen the concept of water resources as common goods of mutual responsibility. There are significant opportunities for improvement, including a more holistic approach to landscapes that considers complementary impacts on sustainable natural resource management, conservation, climate change and sustainable livelihoods.

The '*International Waters*' projects aimed to promote the protection of water resources as a mutual responsibility of neighbouring countries by strengthening binational governance systems. This type of project combines conflict resolution goals with the SDGs more broadly. Initial results on the southern border with Peru have paved the way for new binational watershed management projects on the northern border with Colombia, on the Mira-Mataje and Carchi-Guaitara watersheds.⁹⁸

The first phase of the '*Three Basins*' project,⁹⁹ for example, supported the creation of a binational commission, which facilitated binational dialogue and cooperation between Ecuador and Peru, thus improving the integrated management of international waters. The importance of this commission can be seen in its recent expansion to cover nine binational basins across Ecuador and Peru, and its capacity to put integrated

⁹⁵ Project IDs 85032 and 112385 respectively.

⁹⁶ Osprey (bio-corridor Rio Chone), turtle nests (Rio Portoviejo), Wax Palm (biocorredor Mesurrumi), Andean bear (biocorredores Cotacachi Cayapas, Pisque-Mojanda and Cayambe Coca), condor (bio-corridor Condor Chuquiragua and Mesurrumi), vicuña and alpaca (bio-corridor RF Chimborazo), esmeralda hummingbird (bio-corridor Chongon Colonghe), poison dart frog (biocorredor Yaku Samay).

⁹⁷ UNDP, Midterm review of 'Sustainable development of the Ecuadorian Amazon: integrated management of multiple-use landscapes and high-value conservation forests project'.

⁹⁸ GEF Project: Integrated management of aquatic resources in the binational basins (Colombia-Ecuador) Mira-Mataje and Carchi-Guaitara.

⁹⁹ Project ID 83398.

international water management on the agenda of bilateral presidential meetings. In addition, through support to training of 600 people (97 percent of identified stakeholders), and the use of a joint strategic planning process, the project reinforced governance through the generation of a trans-border analysis, a strategic action programme and a national action plan for the three basins, approved by the two countries.

In Ecuador, four pilot models for water and sanitation were implemented across 105,056 ha. for more sustainable use of resources.¹⁰⁰ In addition, local authorities drafted five water management models, although these have not yet been fully implemented. The project evaluation found that most of the project's goals were met, but also identified several weaknesses, such as the lack of strategies for knowledge management, replication and communication.¹⁰¹ Delays in the completion of hydrological studies, and failure to implement the designed models or declare planned water protection zones also cast doubt on compliance of the project results with water quality and distribution capacity standards. The project had limited scope in terms of enhancing the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus, achieving more significant impact in terms of sustainable livelihoods, conservation, climate change and addressing the root causes of environmental problems arising from the poverty-environment nexus.

Finding 8. Marine biodiversity: UNDP improved the governance of marine-coastal resources and fisheries by creating unprecedented spaces for dialogue in the sector, driving progress for livelihood preservation with a gender perspective. However, elements external to the projects may compromise the effectiveness of the interventions and the conservation of marine biodiversity.

UNDP focus on marine biodiversity during this programme cycle has been broader than under previous cycles. International trade and governance components have been incorporated into traditional coastal marine planning through two projects, one global ('Global Sustainable Marine Value Chains', or GMC) and one regional ('Coastal Fisheries Initiative' or CFI).¹⁰² Work has focused on coastal marine resources such as mangroves, coastal fishing such as small pelagic fish, artisanal pole and line tuna, and open seas dolphinfish fisheries.¹⁰³ Most importantly, the projects seek to address longstanding governance issues in small pelagic fish industries.

The relevance of the interventions is confirmed by the fact that Ecuador is among the 25 countries with the largest fishing volumes in the world.¹⁰⁴ The fishing industry plays a strategic role in the country, ensuring food security for fishing communities, as a significant direct and indirect source of employment and an important economic activity for trade and development.¹⁰⁵

Participatory governance systems have been strengthened through dialogue roundtables that include the various fishing associations and authorities, with UNDP taking advantage of its impartiality to provide administration and facilitation. These roundtables succeeded in fostering a culture of consensual decision-making that was previously lacking, which had been considered very problematic. The sector has received the results of the small pelagic fish roundtable well, to the point that other fisheries are requesting similar processes, such as for large pelagic longline fishing. The GMC project provided support and technical

¹⁰⁰ Two with basic household sanitation/ household waste filtering systems and two with barrier protection to prevent livestock from entering water sources.

¹⁰¹ UNDP, Final Evaluation of Integrated water resources management in the puyango-tumbes, catamayo-chira and zarumilla transboundary aquifers and river basins project.

¹⁰² Project IDs 83706 and 104643.

¹⁰³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wevJFbiH6bc>; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNQKUOQeuVc>.

¹⁰⁴ Among the most important fisheries in terms of catch are small pelagic fish (337,053 MT) which is mainly for human consumption and reduction, tuna (286,946 MT) through its purse seine and pole-and-line tuna fleet, and dolphinfish (6,153 MT) with one of the largest small-scale artisanal fleets in the Southeast Pacific. <http://pesqueriassostenibles.produccion.gob.ec>.

¹⁰⁵ Ecuador's small pelagic fishing generates more than 24,000 jobs and on average \$235 million annually in exports. <https://www.produccion.gob.ec/ecuador-presento-plan-para-la-pesqueria-industrial-de-peces-pelagicos-pequenos>.

advice to generate a series of action plans for different resources (large pelagic fish, tuna, pole and line tuna and dolphinfish)¹⁰⁶ and, within the framework of CFI, self-regulation agreements were put in place for coastal zone resources (black shell and red crab). With its implementing partner Conservation International, and the National Fisheries Institute as a counterpart, the CFI project elaborated marine-coastal planning and management measures and their respective management plans.

The interventions stand out for the incorporation of a gender perspective in a traditionally male-dominated sector. UNDP supported the updating of the 'Gender Focus Strategy' to advance the inclusion of women and visibility of women's roles in the fisheries sector. The implementation of the strategy was boosted by products such as the 'Basic Guidelines for Gender-focused Fisheries Improvement Projects'.¹⁰⁷

One core issue for the sector, the management and mitigation of external elements that generate threats of degradation of marine ecosystems and their resources, was not reflected in the scope of these projects.¹⁰⁸ This issue originates from large-scale industrial fishing from different countries in international water strips. An aggravating factor for Ecuador is the strip of international water that lies between the continental marine area and the area around the Galapagos Islands, which are connected by water currents through which marine fauna moves. Inaction to strengthen the protection of these international waters at international level could affect the resources of the projects and thus their very *raison d'être*, with profound consequences on the country's food security and livelihoods.

Finding 9. Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and other hazardous chemicals and waste: An influx of resources and technical expertise helped UNDP to generate global environmental benefits in terms of reducing POPs, PCBs, mercury and aggregate extraction, by strengthening the institutional and legal framework and building capacity to enable alternative livelihoods.

The period under evaluation was characterized by significant growth in the budget, donors and thematic areas of the chemical portfolio compared to previous periods.¹⁰⁹ The relevance of the portfolio is high, given that sound management of hazardous chemicals has been hampered by several issues (political, economic, governance and technical) that have threatened the environment and human health for years.

UNDP supported MAAE to implement commitments to the Stockholm,¹¹⁰ Basel¹¹¹ and Minamata¹¹² conventions. UNDP contributions to the institutional strengthening of the Chemicals Unit of MAAE included support for the development of action plans,¹¹³ and national statistics reports for POPs and mercury, and training, for example to reduce the emission of unintentional POPs. The legal framework was strengthened through the creation of regulations¹¹⁴ and handbooks,¹¹⁵ which were further institutionalized and became more sustainable when the Chemicals Unit was elevated to Directorate of Chemicals, Hazardous and Non-Hazardous Waste and Residues, despite the country's economic challenges.

¹⁰⁶ Important work has been done with different National Plans of Action: Tuna has its Action Plan formalized by Ministerial Agreement No. MPCEIP-SRP-2019-00184-A; Dolphinfish has a National Action Plan launched by the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment and Fisheries on 4 March 2019. Tuna with pole and line has a Management Plan by Ministerial Agreement No. MPCEIP-SRP-2019-0020-A.

¹⁰⁷ See <https://globalmarinecommodities.org/es/publications/lineamientos-basicos-para-un-proyecto-de-mejora-pesquera-con-enfoque-de-genero>.

¹⁰⁸ Among the resources that could be directly affected are the Perico, Dolphinfish or Dorado fish, which accompany other species such as giant squid that are targeted, or tuna pole and line fishing.

¹⁰⁹ From small GEF funds supporting enabling activities in the past, it has been expanded to a GEF-funded Programme of about \$8.5 million.

¹¹⁰ Stipulates obligations to reduce or eliminate the production and use of pesticides and industrial chemicals that constitute POPs.

¹¹¹ On the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal.

¹¹² To protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

¹¹³ E.g. Action plan for the management of products with POPs.

¹¹⁴ In 2019, in the elaboration of the Regulation of the National Committee on Environmental Quality, which coordinates cross-sectoral public policy, within the framework of environmental quality, including ensuring the sound management of chemicals.

¹¹⁵ Standardized categorization manual and environmental management plans to improve environmental regulation process.

With *'Agrocalidad'*, UNDP coordinated the updating of the inventory of obsolete pesticides in Ecuador,¹¹⁶ enabling the collection and export for destruction of 138 tonnes of obsolete chlorinated pesticides in 2020. Interviewees highlighted this as a significant achievement, given the high cost and the difficulties facing institutions such as MAAE or MAG.

UNDP supported the *'Allies of the Environment'* media and social media campaign,¹¹⁷ to raise awareness of rural shopkeepers¹¹⁸ of the proper handling of pesticide containers and increase the collection of empty containers. However, challenges were identified in improving institutional processes to prevent new pesticides from becoming obsolete and requiring disposal. In addition, there were challenges in the way some products are categorized for customs, making it difficult to trace imported chemicals.¹¹⁹

UNDP has contributed to eliminating mercury through the *'National Programme for Environmentally Sound Management and Life Cycle Management of Chemicals'*,¹²⁰ working with artisanal miners to provide them with mercury-free alternatives and create financial incentives.¹²¹ It also strengthened the analytical capacity of the Institute for Geological and Energy Research chemical laboratory, which contributed to the generation of technical and scientific knowledge to reduce mercury in artisanal and small-scale gold mining extraction processes.¹²²

From a gender perspective, support for the formalization of three gold mining associations, including one of artisanal women miners (*jancheras*), stands out. These women worked extracting gold from the waste produced by male miners, and were trained to change their activity to working on GAD-facilitated community orchards, and taught goldsmithing. As a result, UNDP reports that this group of women has stopped using 300 kilos of mercury per year. Although the activity of the *jancheras* was in decline, this was accelerated by the project. Moreover, the project brought added value through the generation of mutual support and service networks that have been of great importance in response to the COVID-19 emergency.¹²³

UNDP elaborated a baseline and proposed action plan to eliminate mercury-containing products in the health (thermometers) and lighting sectors. For the latter, an inventory was made of mercury-containing lighting fixtures of the 20 electricity companies on the mainland, and those of Galapagos were collected, although no cost-benefit analysis had been carried out by the time of this evaluation for either sector, nor studies for the reduction of all the other products listed in the Minamata Convention (including amalgam fillings). Life cycle analyses of individual interventions are also missing, such as preventing new pesticides becoming obsolete and pilots to reduce mercury in mining practices.

¹¹⁶ See <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/ministerio-actualizara-el-inventario-nacional-de-plaguicidas-obsoleteos>.

¹¹⁷ See <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/ecuador-presenta-la-campana-aliados-del-ambiente-para-promover-la-gestion-adecuada-de-envases-de-plaguicidas>.

¹¹⁸ The Agrochemical Producers and Associations APCSA and INNOVAGRO were involved.

¹¹⁹ In order to work on the issue, a proposal was made to the Ministry of Foreign Trade to apply in customs the prohibition or restriction of products that are included in the Minamata and Stockholm Conventions and three scenarios were made: strict, medium and favourable, but this has not yet generated products.

¹²⁰ Project ID 100779.

¹²¹ With the improvement of two financial products of BanEcuador and the Central Bank for the Artisanal and Small-scale Mining sector.

¹²² Through three contracts with competitive funds with the National Polytechnic School, to reduce pollution hotspots, for mercury filtration from a river bed, mercury absorption using plants and mercury removal from a river bed.

¹²³ See <https://www.planetgold.org/es/associations-female-miners-have-become-network-support-care-and-response-covid-19-emergency>.

Concerning aggregate extraction, UNDP made local-level contributions, supporting two GADs (Otavalo and Playas) to develop governance and legal frameworks and build capacity to manage aggregate extraction.¹²⁴ As a result, despite the small budget, relevant products for the rationalization of extraction were developed, such as a situation analysis, a model of regulations for granting concessions for aggregate and stone mining, and training of technicians from Otavalo GAD in the proposed environmental regulations.

Finding 10. Climate change: UNDP has been effective in supporting institutions with technical assistance and capacity-development to advance the country's climate change objectives. However, there is room for improvement in demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of interventions and their contribution to addressing climate change.

There has been significant progress on climate change, including developing a collaborative legal framework and a wide range of relevant initiatives. Results range from policy support at the highest level for compliance with the Paris Agreement, to strengthening governance and coordination between different government and private sector actors at national and local levels. UNDP support has also encompassed on-the-ground interventions in the areas of mitigation, adaptation and the prevention of risks due to climate change.

Given Ecuador's commitments under the Paris Agreement,¹²⁵ UNDP developed capacities in the Government, which resulted in the presentation of the first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Climate Change Convention, in 2019. UNDP technical assistance¹²⁶ helped MAAE lead the design of the NDC,¹²⁷ and commit to reducing its carbon emissions by 20.9 percent as national policy.¹²⁸ These results have become a regional reference-point, due to the focus on participatory and inclusive processes and gender mainstreaming.¹²⁹

Among the contributions reported by UNDP for this project, institutional strengthening stands out, updating the regulations and management of the Interinstitutional Committee on Climate Change, which includes the private sector and contributes to political and technical decision-making in this area.¹³⁰ Institutional capacity was strengthened with a gender perspective, through products such as a technical guide for the incorporation of gender in climate change policies in alliance with the German Development Agency (GIZ),¹³¹ and the incorporation of gender indicators in the MAAE Monitoring, Reporting and Verification System (MRV) and technical tools for their application, in association with UN Women.¹³²

The NDC enabled UNDP to better coordinate between the private and climate finance sectors. A first Climate Business Roundtable for financing climate change mitigation projects took place in September 2020, in a virtual format given the COVID-19 restrictions.¹³³ The same virtual design, which is calculated to have avoided 35,000 kilogrammes of CO₂ equivalent, was continued into the second and third round, promoting green economic reactivation and determining finance needs of approximately \$1.9 billion to mitigate the effects of climate change in Ecuador.¹³⁴

¹²⁴ Project ID 00086259.

¹²⁵ Ecuador ratified its accession to the Paris agreement in 2017.

¹²⁶ Project ID 61982 UNDP global programme funded by Germany and Spain.

¹²⁷ This includes the five mitigation sectors of the International Panel on Climate Change, and six sectors prioritized for adaptation.

¹²⁸ In 2019, Executive Decree 840 was signed, defining this international commitment as State policy. <https://ndclac.org/ndc/ecuador/>.

¹²⁹ See <https://www.ec.undp.org/content/ecuador/es/home/library/metodologia-para-la-formulacion-de-ndc-de-ecuador-un-documento-.html>.

¹³⁰ In their respective Result Oriented Annual Reports (ROARs).

¹³¹ See <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2020/10/GUIAarmadaDe2.pdf>.

¹³² See https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/EQU/UNW_MR.V_Final.pdf.

¹³³ It included 600 participants from 20 countries, mainly from Latin America and Europe. 133 bilateral meetings took place where \$90 million in potential investments were defined.

¹³⁴ See <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/ecuador-convo-ca-la-tercera-rueda-de-negocios-climatica-para-dinamizar-inversiones-publicas-y-promover-una-reactivacion-economica-verde>.

In parallel, UNDP supported MAAE to formulate the fourth National Communication on Climate Change and second Biennial Update Report,¹³⁵ to update the country's greenhouse gas inventory and adaptation and mitigation initiatives, and evaluate progress on implementation of the MRV. The '*National Designated Authority*' project strengthened MAAE capacity to access and manage GCF projects.¹³⁶ Likewise, strengthening of the National Climate Agency through the '*National Adaptation Plan*' (NAP) project¹³⁷ is contributing to the formulation of the NAP, with geo-referenced information on the country's main adaptation requirements.¹³⁸

In terms of implementing adaptation projects on the ground, UNDP has sought to strengthen institutions and build capacity in the city of Esmeraldas, one of the most vulnerable cities in the country.¹³⁹ The project is still being implemented, and has made progress on enabling conditions. A recent audit of the project confirmed payment for planned preliminary conceptual and preparatory work, and some training.¹⁴⁰ However, due to the timing of the project, this evaluation has not been able to gather evidence of any results materializing from this.

In terms of emission reductions for climate change mitigation, various interviewees highlighted the materialization of UNDP and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) efforts since 2012 on the UN REDD project in Ecuador as a relevant achievement.¹⁴¹ This made the first disbursement of \$18.2 million in REDD+ Payments for Results from the GCF possible, for the avoidance of 3.6 million tons of emissions from potential deforestation during 2014. The funds were channelled into a new project administered by UNDP, to set up a nationwide system for managing these payments.¹⁴²

A novelty in the portfolio is the collaboration with '*Empresa Eléctrica Quito*' (EEQ) to promote the reduction of transport emissions through the '*Energy Efficiency*' project.¹⁴³ This aims to introduce electric vehicles in the company, increase the availability of electric car parks and encourage changes in public consumption. By September 2021, a total of 23 electric vehicles had been acquired, of 25 planned, and 11 electric charging stations were being installed.¹⁴⁴ However, the bulk of the project budget has been for the purchase of machinery (such as a micro-tunnelling machine), which has been done efficiently but is not strongly linked to emission reductions. In addition, the project lacks emission reduction impact estimates, an environmental study or cost-benefit analysis, which could explain the importance of the interventions, their environmental and social benefits and the absence of unintended impacts.

Finding 11. Green finance: UNDP has promoted the generation of financial mechanisms to support environmental issues, such as conservation in protected areas and addressing climate change, with innovative projects that provide tools and governance spaces to further develop these issues in the public and private spheres. Achievements to date are relevant, yet some projects were affected by national barriers, and others are too recent to gauge their sustainability and impact.

¹³⁵ Project ID 112463. <https://www.ec.undp.org/content/ecuador/es/home/projects/-cuarta-comunicacion-nacional.html>.

¹³⁶ Project ID 101839.

¹³⁷ Project ID 101840.

¹³⁸ See <http://adaptacioncc.com/>

¹³⁹ Project ID 121247.

¹⁴⁰ Report on the Audit of UNDP Ecuador (Project No. 121247, Output No. 117074).

¹⁴¹ Ecuador was the second country in the world, after Brazil, to gain access to this programme.

¹⁴² Project ID 101841.

¹⁴³ Project ID 117181.

¹⁴⁴ With the future prospect of replacing the entire fleet of 500 vehicles currently running on diesel and for the public to consider purchasing these cars as chargers would be available.

The search for financial mechanisms to obtain additional funds for protected areas and development is considered a global priority, and is very relevant for Ecuador due to the State's economic limitations. During the period under evaluation, relevant contributions were made in this area, mainly through the 'BIOFIN',¹⁴⁵ NDC and SGP projects.¹⁴⁶ Although these achievements are modest, and there are still significant barriers,¹⁴⁷ concrete and innovative efforts have made it possible to strengthen future green finance in the country.

The achievements of the BIOFIN II project have capitalized on previous contributions of BIOFIN-I, including to generate a Trust Fund or investments for bio-enterprises associated with the bio-industry. UNDP contributed to intersectoral governance and coordination of the environmental and financial sectors, involving the public, private and financial sectors. The National Roundtable on Sustainable Finance was created, bringing together high-level authorities and actors. The National Roundtable promotes a model of environmental financial governance to unblock obstacles to mobilizing resources for sustainability and biodiversity conservation.¹⁴⁸ In parallel, UNDP supported the creation of the Social Responsibility and Sustainability Fund in 2019,¹⁴⁹ to mobilize financial resources for the implementation of national climate change and biodiversity strategies through three lines of investment: carbon neutrality, the circular economy and biodiversity.¹⁵⁰

Inputs initially designed to provide alternatives for the financing of protected areas and establish basic water tariffs were very limited, however, due to their incompatibility with national policy. UNDP generated inputs for these components, but these were not approved by MAAE. As a consequence, in 2020 BIOFIN had to reduce the scope of its original indicators on these issues, and at the same time expanded its scope to other issues such as raising funds for addressing climate change. BIOFIN also contributed to raising additional funds by submitting proposals to support the COVID-19 response.

Under the NDC project, interviewees highlighted the importance of UNDP institutional strengthening of MEF, which, due to its structure and regulations, does not have an area dedicated to green finance. Interinstitutional coordination and alliances with international actors inside and outside the country enabled UNDP to generate technical inputs, adapting various methodologies and training 11 professionals on their use.¹⁵¹ In addition, data on public expenditure on climate change obtained through the CPEIR methodology strengthened the traceability of public spending on climate change, providing an input into the quantitative element of the Climate Finance Strategy, as well as baseline information for the NDC.

¹⁴⁵ Whose objective is to "Develop the financing strategy for the Sustainable Management of Biodiversity in Ecuador".

¹⁴⁶ Through the crowdfunding initiative with campaigns to raise co-financing for community ventures.

¹⁴⁷ The subject is new thus there is lack of culture on bio finance within the private sector and government, some national policies that oppose some bio finance initiatives applied in other countries, limitation in the financial data registration complicates the traceability of investments related to reduction of Carbon emissions, institutional coordination is weak, high turnover rate of personnel.

¹⁴⁸ This space has been working with the private financial sector, through the Association of Private Banks (Asobanca) and together with other important stakeholders such as: MAAE, MAG, MEF, Vice-Presidency, GIZ, CAF and the French Development Agency.

¹⁴⁹ This fund was formed within the Environmental and Sustainability Investment Fund (FIAS), which acts with contributions from private enterprise and is led by the Ecuadorian Corporation for Social Responsibility and Sustainability (CERES).

¹⁵⁰ Within the biodiversity line a sub-line for bio-entrepreneurship and bio-industry is considered.

¹⁵¹ Methodologies include: Public Expenditure and institutional reviews (CPEIR) for public expenditure, Private Sector Climate Expenditure and Institutional Review (PCEIR) for private expenditure, CBT for budget labelling and IFF for financial flow analysis. Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) of greenhouse gas mitigation methodology to trace emissions and greenhouse gas reduction (Carbon Dioxide, Methane, Nitrous Oxide, Fluorinated Gases).

UNDP also promoted environmental issues, namely green finance, with the public and private financial sectors. UNDP worked with the National Corporation for Popular Credit and Savings Finance Operatives (CONAFIPS), to develop green credit lines and socio-environmental risk management systems.¹⁵² This enabled an agreement between the Quito Stock Exchange and MAEE to be signed, leading to the launch of the first issue of Green Bonds in Ecuador.

2.3 Outcome 3: Socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods

CPD Outcome 3. By 2022, Ecuador has policies and norms favouring diversification of the productive structure, generation of decent work and sustainable livelihoods and economic inclusion, with equal opportunities for women and men.

Related outputs:

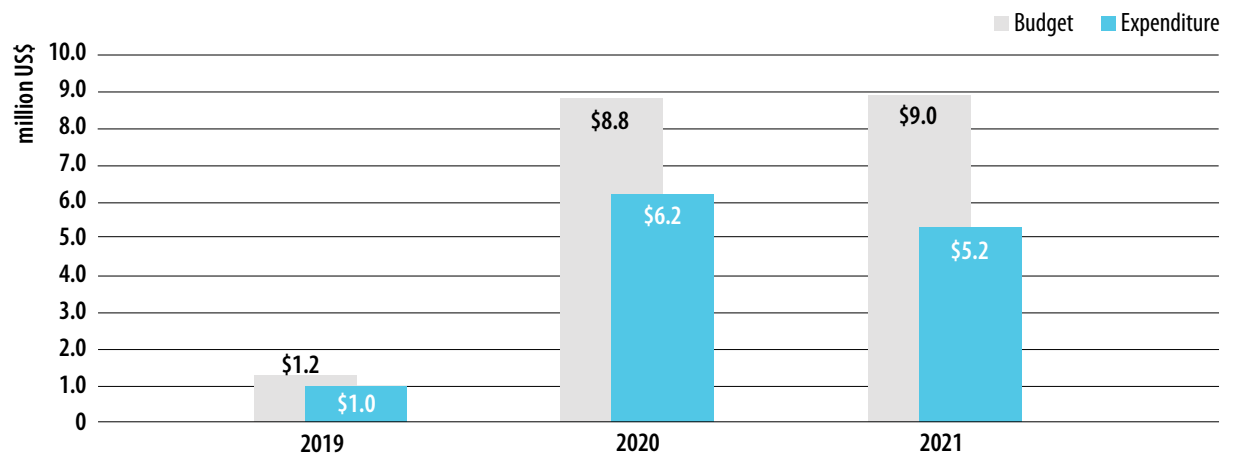
OUTPUT 3.1. Public policy instruments and/or mechanisms designed or implemented to promote equitable economic inclusion and improve people's livelihoods.

A total of six projects with eight project outputs were implemented under this outcome, with a budget of \$19 million and expenditure of \$12.4 million.¹⁵³ All six projects (100 percent of expenditure) were directly implemented by UNDP (DIM). This outcome experienced rapid growth in budget and implementation in 2020 due to the inclusion of COVID-19 response projects. Government cost-sharing represented 86 percent of expenditure. The municipality of Guayaquil has been the primary source of funds for this outcome (84 percent of expenditure), followed by UNDP (7 percent of expenditure) and the Government of Italy (4 percent of expenditure).

¹⁵² <https://www.finanzaspopulares.gob.ec/creditos> CONAFIPS grants loans to organizations in the popular and solidarity-based financial sector, such as cooperatives, i.e. savings and credit cooperatives, mutuels, savings banks and village banks. The aim of CONAFIPS is to strengthen these organizations in order to enable them, in turn, to provide loans to entrepreneurs in the popular and solidarity economy.

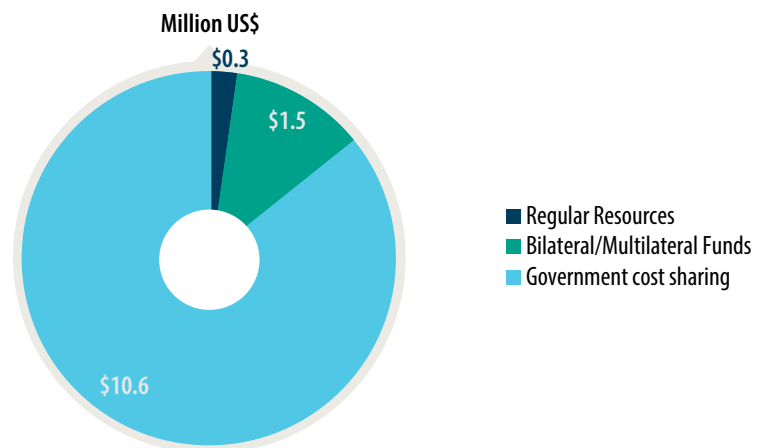
¹⁵³ The financial resources correspond to the period: 2017 to June 2021.

FIGURE 8. Evolution of budget and expenditure for Socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021.

FIGURE 9. Expenditure by fund category for Socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021.

Finding 12. Decent work: UNDP has effectively promoted mechanisms for the promotion of economic development, including capacity-building of micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME), demonstrating synergy with other initiatives and a high adaptive capacity in response to COVID-19, but with limited potential impact on national policy.

Following the 2016 earthquake, UNDP articulated the ‘SDGs Value Chains’ programme to support the socioeconomic reactivation of affected areas, and at national level.¹⁵⁴ The programme encompasses five methodologies to address each link in the production chain, to contribute to the creation of

¹⁵⁴ <https://odscadenasvalor.org>.

quality employment and promote economic growth.¹⁵⁵ In this programme cycle, the *'Inclusive Economic Development'* project has enabled these methodologies to be implemented and used, in coordination with local governments and civil society.¹⁵⁶

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the synergy of the SDG Value Chains programme with *PROAmazonia* was notable. The promotion of bio-enterprises started in 2018, with a focus on small businesses, through the *'Iniciando con su negocio'* methodology.¹⁵⁷ This initiative aimed to achieve sustainable alliances along the supply chain, to competitively integrate bio-enterprises into the market. Six of the eight bio-enterprises initially identified were reported to have completed all five stages of the methodology, resulting in improvements in management and marketing.¹⁵⁸ Interventions have been focused at community level, reaching 769 direct beneficiaries, 65 percent of whom were women.

Similarly, *PROAmazonia* capitalized on the *'Creciendo con su Negocio'* methodology that was promoted to 30 associations and ten coffee and cocoa collection centres.¹⁵⁹ This intervention enabled 2,073 direct beneficiaries to be reached (of whom 855 were women), 118 organizational improvement plans formulated, and environmental sustainability strengthened through business models and value propositions associated with nature conservation and deforestation-free products. However, the implementation of the two methodologies was affected by two key events, a national strike in October 2019 and the declaration of a State of Emergency in March 2020. As a result, product sales and improvements in economic returns were limited.¹⁶⁰

In response to COVID-19, UNDP launched the *'En Marcha Digital'* methodological package.¹⁶¹ Interviewees highlighted this initiative as proof of the rapid responsiveness and adaptability of UNDP to the new context, helping to revive businesses affected by the pandemic through digital tools. A broad partnership with national institutions, local governments in 11 provinces, Quito and Guayaquil and the private sector, helped to implement the *'En Marcha Digital'* programme with direct training for more than 1,300 MSMEs. The initiative is reported to have reached over 100,000 MSMEs throughout the country. Women's economic empowerment was emphasized and, in some cases, women victims of GBV participated in the programme to strengthen their livelihoods.¹⁶² In addition, UNDP successfully exported and replicated the programme in four other countries in the region, Colombia, Guatemala, Barbados and Uruguay.

Community-level Inclusion and inclusive economic development were also supported through the promotion of heritage and cultural tourism associated with the *Qhapac Ñan* route and the Andean Road System. UNDP promoted livelihood generation to improve the living conditions of rural communities along the *Qhapac Ñan* route through a tri-national project in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. A master plan was developed for the implementation and promotion of community-based heritage tourism. A tourist route was designed, signage was installed and the Andean Road System was publicized with promotional videos and a partnership with a private tour operator. Good practices were observed in terms of South-South

¹⁵⁵ Desarrollo de Proveedores, *Creciendo con su Negocio*, *Iniciando con su Negocio*, *Microfranquicias*, *En Marcha* y *En Marcha Digital*.

¹⁵⁶ Project id 104569.

¹⁵⁷ Advises MSMEs during their start-up phase. It aims to strengthen marketing, financial, administrative and productive conditions, validate their business models and encourage them to grow in a sustained manner by linking them to productive chains.

¹⁵⁸ *PROAmazonia* (2021), Final technical and budgetary report on the implementation of the methodology "starting your business" in bio-enterprises.

¹⁵⁹ This methodology aims to support small businesses to improve their financial, administrative and productive conditions, to bring them to a level where they can establish long-term supply relationships with formal and informal market enterprises.

¹⁶⁰ Coffee sales increased by 28 percent in October 2020 compared to the previous year, but cocoa suffered a 31 percent decrease.

¹⁶¹ A set of eight methodological guidelines to reactivate businesses during COVID-19. <http://www.odscadenasvalor.org/en-marcha-digital>.

¹⁶² The case of Otavalo and Rumiñahui in an initiative developed with civil society partner CEPAM and the British Embassy.

Cooperation (SSC) between the three countries involved in the project. However, in terms of results, the impact was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the almost total paralysis of national and global tourism.

Finding 13. Women's economic empowerment: UNDP has made substantive progress in integrating women's economic empowerment into its programme, resulting in the development of public policies for women's equality in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP contributed to strengthening women's leadership and resilience by training them in traditionally male-dominated productive sectors, but there is no clarity on how those specific project-level initiatives will be scaled up or achieve sustainability.

To address the challenges and living conditions of women in times of COVID-19, UNDP supported the Vice-Presidency of the Republic and the Secretary of Human Rights to develop the 'National Violet Economy Strategy'. UNDP recruited an international consultant to develop a work plan, results framework, theory of change, problem tree and mapping of public and private service providers. With this support, the initiative from the former Vice-presidency was elevated to a strategy with a \$57 million budget, and eventually to a public policy named 'Violet Economy: for the economic rights and a life free of violence against women'.¹⁶³ The main objective of this policy was to promote the creation of livelihood opportunities to advance women's economic inclusion and gender equality, with emphasis on GBV, and to minimize the impact of the socioeconomic crisis on women in response to COVID-19. It was launched in 2021 by the former President, who recognized UNDP as a strategic partner. To guarantee its sustainability, UNDP Ecuador must continue to promote it with the new Government.

During this programme cycle, UNDP also promoted women's participation and leadership in male-dominated fields in Ecuador, such as the environment, fishing and mining. Several interviewees claimed that UNDP has been instrumental in providing technical assistance and training for gender mainstreaming into legal and regulatory frameworks. This has resulted in the development of a technical guide to mainstream gender into climate change management programmes and (under the BIOFIN project) in banking and financial institutions.¹⁶⁴ Women in the fishing sector benefited from UNDP gender training and gender-sensitive communication awareness for national institutions, fishing organizations and artisanal miners.¹⁶⁵ In the mining sector, UNDP supported women mineral selectors (*jancheras*) to seek alternative livelihoods, including kitchen gardening and goldsmithing.¹⁶⁶

UNDP efforts to apply innovative solutions to promote local economic development also achieved results in terms of women's economic empowerment. For example, the '*Blockchain Chocolate*' initiative empowered women in chocolate production and their contribution to the economic life of their communities and local economic growth.¹⁶⁷ According to interviews, women recognised UNDP Ecuador's implementation of blockchain technology as a trigger for more efficient production, higher profits and greater self-confidence as cocoa producers.¹⁶⁸ Also, to empower women as agents of change in their communities, UNDP, in

¹⁶³ Government of Ecuador (2020) Violet Economy: for the economic rights and a life free of women's violence.

¹⁶⁴ MAAE, UNDP, GIZ (2020), Technical Guide for the Integration of a Gender Focus into the Climate Change Management in Ecuador. <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2020/10/GUIAarmadaDe2.pdf>.

¹⁶⁵ National Chamber of Fisheries (2021). <https://camaradepesqueria.ec/fortalecimiento-de-capacidades-en-pesca-sostenible-a-tripulantes-de-la-pesqueria-de-peces-pelagicos-pequenos-de-ecuador>.

¹⁶⁶ For gardening, UNDP implemented the family vegetable garden project with the Ministry of Environment and Water, Heifer International and the GEF-funded National Program for the Environmentally Appropriate Management of Chemical Substances in their Life Cycle (PNGQ). <https://www.planetgold.org/strengthening-safety-net-women-miners-ecuador>. For goldsmithing, UNDP assisted MAAE, the Ministry of Energy and Non-Renewable Natural Resources (MERNNR) and GEF to introduce women to goldsmithing. <https://www.planetgold.org/gold-mining-goldsmithing>.

¹⁶⁷ Information collected through interviews and: World Economic Forum (2020), '*Your favourite chocolate is about to get a lot tastier – here's why*'. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/cocoa-chocolate-the-other-bar-value-chain-undp-ecuador>.

¹⁶⁸ Information collected through interviews and United Nations (2019) 'Chocolate bar aims to tackle poverty in the cocoa sector'. <https://www.candyindustry.com/articles/88824-un-chocolate-bar-aims-to-tackle-poverty-in-the-cocoa-sector>.

partnership with MAAE, MAG, FAO and UN Women, conducted capacity-building workshops on leadership and economic empowerment through *Antisuyo Warmikuna*, the leadership school for indigenous women of the Amazon.¹⁶⁹ The '*Antisuyo Warmikuna*' initiative, funded by GCF and GEF, was created within the *PROAmazonia* programme to support the equitable development of indigenous women and mainstream a gender approach in the region. As of 2020, 80 indigenous women leaders had participated in this initiative. However, due to the pandemic, workshops were suspended until the launch of virtual modules.¹⁷⁰

In 2018, with the support of the UNDP Regional Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean (RSC-LAC), and in partnership with the Ecuadorian Business Committee, the Public Companies Coordinating Body and the National Council for Gender Equality, UNDP supported the Ministry of Labour to implement the pilot of the '*Gender Equality Seal for Public and Private Companies*' programme.¹⁷¹ According to interviews and document review, the results of this pilot were: (i) the development of a technical protocol for the implementation of the initiative; (ii) the creation of a management and financial model and operating manuals; (iii) gender mainstreaming training for the partners; and (iv) dissemination of the pilot in forums and specialist journals on women's economic empowerment. UNDP worked with UN Women to ensure coherence between the Gender Equality Seal and the Women's Empowerment Principles and avoid duplication. The post-pilot execution phase has not taken place due to the pandemic, lack of resources and other priorities of the Ministry of Labour, and RSC-LAC did not consider it sustainable to implement the pilot without public resources. Nevertheless, internal and external interviewees commented that UNDP Ecuador plans to present this pilot to the new Government for adoption and funding, given the strong potential of the initiative to achieve results for gender equality in the workplace.

Finding 14.COVID-19: UNDP contributed to the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic in a coordinated manner, leveraging its procurement capacity and promoting innovative development approaches for early recovery and community livelihoods.

Given the emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁷² and the activation of the Humanitarian Country Team, the United Nations country team coordinated an internal process for distributing situation reports and requests for immediate needs from the Government to sectoral leaders to provide harmonized support. UNDP was part of this structure and led the 'Early Recovery and Livelihoods' sector, comprising 16 bodies including United Nations agencies and NGOs. As a result, initial needs for cleaning, disinfection and disseminating prevention and protection messages and guidelines were addressed.¹⁷³ Support to the health sector focused on remote areas of the country with high indigenous and farmer populations, providing health centres with PPE and essential supplies to respond adequately to the emergency. An artificial intelligence solution, the 'Catalina' Chatbot, was set up to help the Government unblock the hotline to attend to COVID-19 patients and questions, available on over 76 government webpages with more than 450 questions and answers. This initiative was led by UNDP and funded by five United Nations agencies, and over 164,900 chats were answered between May and August 2020.

Interviewees confirmed that the UNDP response to COVID- 19 was timely, transparent and efficient. The intervention that best demonstrates this was carried out with the Guayaquil local authority to acquire and distribute food kits. A request was made to UNDP because of its previous positioning in terms of

¹⁶⁹ See <https://www.agricultura.gob.ec/lanzamiento-de-la-escuela-de-formacion-de-mujeres-antisuyo-warmikuna>.

¹⁷⁰ Mentioned in UNDP Ecuador ROAR 2020 and validated in interviews.

¹⁷¹ Project ID 00111829.

¹⁷² Ecuador was under a State of Emergency from March to September 2020.

¹⁷³ A national radio campaign (over 100 radio stations) was promoted and co-financed with the Community, popular and educational media coordinator for Ecuador, together with several United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Ecuador, targeting indigenous communities in Spanish, Quichua and Shuar.

economic development and added value in procurement and transparency. The intervention was relevant in a context of compulsory home isolation and the need to ensure food security in marginal urban areas of the locality. UNDP initially worked with the World Food Programme (WFP) to define the kits and validate their nutritional value.

Stakeholders highlighted the efficiency of the processes and logistics, especially when the kits began to include perishable products. Value for money was reflected in the delivery of a total of 518,110 kits, almost 12 percent more than the requested 463,500 kits, thanks to the competitive process developed and external quality control verification of the kits. After the first delivery,¹⁷⁴ three addenda were signed,¹⁷⁵ which made it possible to extend the intervention to a total execution of \$7.5 million and thus achieve the delivery of food kits to 554,600 families in the area. An independent assessment by Ecotec University on the socioeconomic impact of humanitarian aid in the city of Guayaquil confirmed that *“it was timely for the most vulnerable people in highly populated areas”*.¹⁷⁶

The receipt of the first COVID-19 Rapid Response Funds, and the subsequent Rapid Financing Facility, enabled UNDP Ecuador to use its early recovery-oriented livelihoods development approach, adapting the *‘En marcha’* methodology into *‘En marcha digital’*.¹⁷⁷ Alliances were formed to develop and roll out guides, and cascade training was provided to different economic development agencies.¹⁷⁸ As an example of good practice in support and evidence-based work, in collaboration with RBLAC, UNDP Ecuador launched a national survey of over 4,000 businesses to understand their needs. A crowdfunding strategy was promoted to contribute to the reactivation of employment in Galapagos, highly impacted due to its dependence on tourism. This raised \$82,000, which benefitted 115 people through a cash-for-work beach cleaning activity, which also brought together local NGOs and raised awareness on plastics and waste.¹⁷⁹ Rapid Financing Facility funds enabled a second cash-for-training mechanism, expected to train entrepreneurs on resilient and sustainable business models and eventually deliver seed funding for innovative entrepreneurial ideas in the Galapagos Islands, within the UNDP *‘Build Back Better’* vision.

‘DreamLab’ was another socioeconomic response, driven by UNDP funding from the Engagement Facility. In partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), this initiative strengthened community resilience through training, mentoring and funding for the formulation and implementation of micro-projects developed by young people from vulnerable neighbourhoods. Interventions on informal youth employment proved to be particularly relevant in the pandemic context. As a result of the pilot project in Quito, the scope was expanded through the *‘National Capacity Development for Conflict Prevention’* joint programme with the Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (DPPA),¹⁸⁰ and seed funding to develop the Tulcán DreamLab on the northern border with Colombia. This aims to prevent conflict within communities by addressing local and institutional weaknesses and developing community support networks, working with local and migrant populations.

¹⁷⁴ The first purchase budgeted \$850,000 for the acquisition of 50,000 kits, managed to deliver 54,610 kits.

¹⁷⁵ First for an additional 100,000 kits (\$1.5 million); The second of 100,000 kits (\$1.5 million); the third of 200,000 kits (\$3.9 million).

¹⁷⁶ Vergara Romero et al. (2020), Assessing the socioeconomic impact of humanitarian aid in the covid-19 health crisis: validity of an instrument. *Revista Científica Ecociencia*, 7(5), 76–93.

¹⁷⁷ See Finding 12 for details.

¹⁷⁸ In alliance with the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment and Fisheries, the Economic Promotion Agency, the Municipal Public Company for the Management of Innovation and Competitiveness of Guayaquil and the Network of Local Economic Development Agents of Ecuador.

¹⁷⁹ The selection criteria used were sex, age and vulnerability (unemployed and caregivers).

¹⁸⁰ Project ID 116957.

The Accelerator Lab framework was conducive to pilot different initiatives to counteract the effects of the pandemic.¹⁸¹ For example, it enabled cash-for-training to produce PPE, supporting the livelihoods of a seamstress network in Quito. The network received training through digital tutorials, open-licensed digital patterns, and formally consolidated and established contacts with external partners, thereby strengthening livelihood sustainability for the 26 participating seamstresses. Another initiative was aimed at grassroots recyclers,¹⁸² with four pilot routes for differentiated waste collection during the first months of the pandemic, using a behavioural economics methodology and a mobile application, resulting in more than six metric tonnes of recyclables handed over to grassroots recyclers for commercialization.

2.4 Outcome 4: Democratic governance

CPD Outcome 4. By 2022, Ecuador has stronger, coordinated institutions favouring public governance and citizen participation in protection for rights, consolidating democratic society, peace and equality.

Related outputs:

OUTPUT 4.1. Institutions strengthened for efficient, transparent, participatory governance of public policies in line with the SDGs.

OUTPUT 4.2. Local governments strengthened to exercise their competencies in a participatory manner, and contribute to localizing the SDGs in their territory.

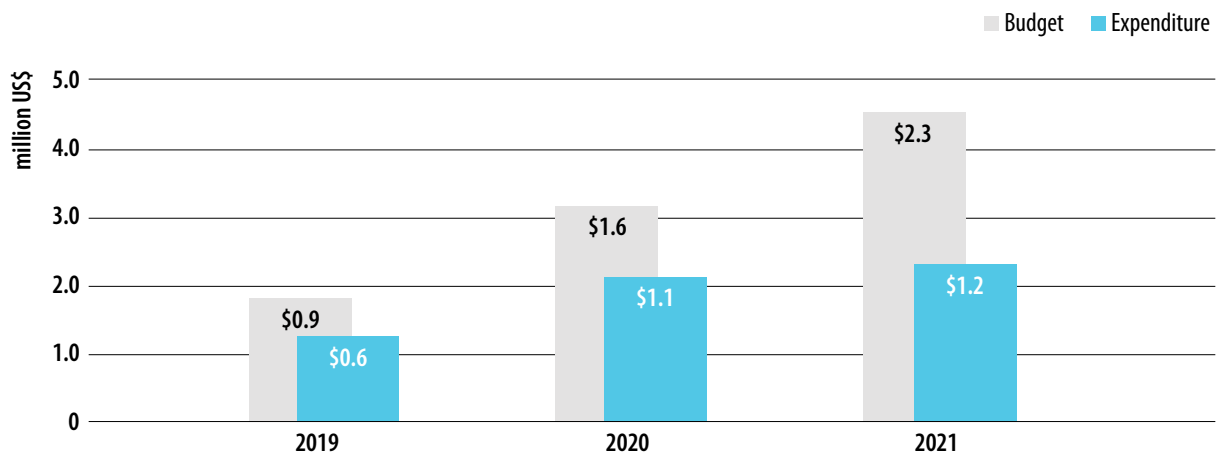
A total of nine projects, with nine project outputs, were implemented under Outcome 4, with a budget of \$4.7 million and expenditure of \$2.9 million.¹⁸³ UNDP directly implemented seven projects (99 percent of expenditure) and two were nationally implemented (1 percent of expenditure). Bilateral and multilateral funds were the primary source of funding for this outcome, at approximately 50 percent (\$1.4 million). Key funders of the portfolio were UNDP with 25 percent of expenditure, followed by Guayaquil local authority (14 percent of expenditure), the Government of Germany (13 percent of expenditure) and the Government of Ecuador (12 percent of expenditure).

¹⁸¹ Project ID 118535.

¹⁸² Worker who selects, collects, recovers, transforms, markets and reuses solid waste. Their livelihood depends on the its sale.

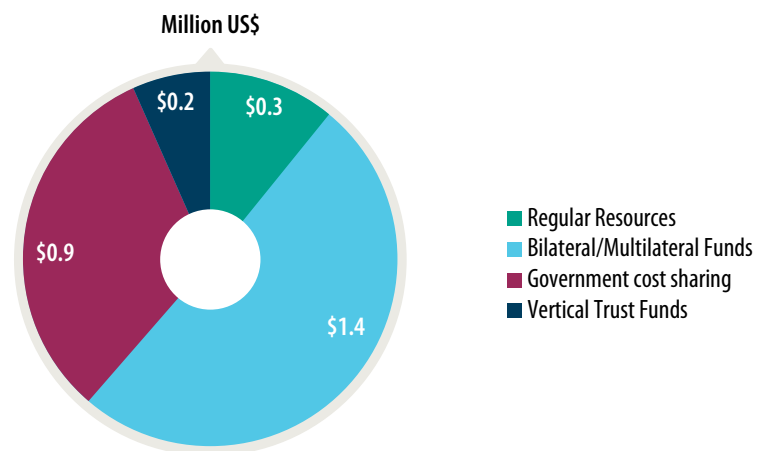
¹⁸³ The financial resources correspond to the period: 2017 to June 2021.

FIGURE 10. Evolution of budget and expenditure for Democratic governance (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021

FIGURE 11. Expenditure by fund category for Democratic governance (2019-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021

Finding 15. SDGs: UNDP took the lead in strengthening national, subnational and local institutional capacity for efficient, transparent and participatory governance of public policy, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, through technical advice and methodological guides. However, the sustainability of most projects will be necessary to ensure long-term results, especially for strengthening local institutions.

At national level, various interviewees agreed on the relevance of the UNDP role in promoting the 2030 Agenda and mainstreaming the SDGs. UNDP technical support and advice strengthened institutional competencies for implementation of the SDGs. This support began in the previous programme cycle, when UNDP accompanied the National Assembly for the alignment of national priorities in the National

Development Plan 2017-21 *'Toda Una Vida'* with the SDGs. It has continued to be very present since then, as evidenced by its recent support to Ecuador's second Voluntary National Report, which covered the impact of the pandemic on the fulfilment of the SDGs.¹⁸⁴

The *'Financing the SDGs and Combating Child Malnutrition'* project aims to build an Integrated National Financing Framework to strengthen national planning and budgeting exercises to achieve the SDGs.¹⁸⁵ So far, this has generated interinstitutional spaces, led by UNDP, to consolidate agreements and methodological resources for SDG implementation, focusing on vulnerable groups prioritized in the planning processes.¹⁸⁶ MEF budget information was registered, and the public budget was aligned with the SDGs. The project quickly adapted to the COVID-19 context and redesigned its planned dissemination events for a virtual space. A digital platform for monitoring and tracking SDG financing will be launched.¹⁸⁷ In terms of sustainability for a post-pandemic context, this platform is expected to allow the monitoring of resources allocated to the fulfilment of sustainable development and poverty reduction by civil society, academia and productive sectors. This project could benefit greatly from the lessons and good practices of the PDNA exercise and coordination of the COVID-19 response.

At subnational level, UNDP has strengthened the capacities of public institutions to mainstream the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs through the *'Promoting knowledge and implementation of the SDGs at subnational level'* project, under the Engagement Facility. Together with other actors,¹⁸⁸ UNDP sensitized national and local political organizations participating in the 2019 local elections on the importance of the 2030 Agenda and the need to incorporate the SDGs into their electoral proposals and work plans, within the competencies of GADs. UNDP also provided technical assistance to include the 2030 Agenda into PDOTs at local level, and provided technical support to the national planning body for a toolkit for local planning targeted at each level of government. The results of this were published and disseminated, and training sessions were held on various guidelines.¹⁸⁹

At local level, UNDP strengthened the local governments of Quito and Cuenca in urban development and planning with a focus on the SDGs and the external promotion of cities through participatory processes, although both projects showed notable weaknesses in terms of sustainability. With the *'Vision Quito 2040'* project, UNDP supported the local government to define the city's vision for 2040, linked to international commitments such as the New Urban Agenda¹⁹⁰ and the SDGs, through a broad participatory process.¹⁹¹ However, the project was hampered by an internal political crisis in the local authority and the high turnover of staff at the Urban Planning Institute. Officials were trained to conduct the participatory process, but local authority interviewees reported a lack of methodological guidelines to replicate it in the future. Sustainability is at risk due to the lack of support to mobilize international development funds and develop financing strategies. Through the *'Strengthening the management and articulation of cooperation*

¹⁸⁴ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26393VNR_2020_Ecuador_Spanish.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Project ID 125719.

¹⁸⁶ With the Vice-Presidency, the National Secretariat of Planning and MEF.

¹⁸⁷ See <https://odsterritorioecuador.ec>

¹⁸⁸ Other United Nations agencies, NEC, the National Secretariat of Planning, CONGOPE, Association of Municipalities of Ecuador and CONEGOPARE.

¹⁸⁹ Guidelines for the articulation between the Development and Land Management Plan with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs; Equality approaches in local planning; Tool for the integration of Climate Change criteria in the Development and Land Management Plans; among others; and guides for the preparation of development plans at each level of government in which the 2030 Agenda is mentioned.

¹⁹⁰ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020), The New Urban Agenda. <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>.

¹⁹¹ A total of 140 high-level experts, 800 representatives of more than 300 social, trade and craft organizations, six faculties of architecture from different areas of the city of Quito who contributed with urban designs in line with the new form of organization proposed by the new city model and 63 neighbourhoods strategically selected so that their voice would be representative of the city participated.

and internationalization of Cuenca' project, UNDP supported the Cuenca local authority to elaborate a management model for the international positioning of the city, but also reported the lack of a sustainability strategy and limited UNDP proactivity in this regard.

Other initiatives such as the 'Local Pact for the SDGs', in collaboration with the Local Authority Association of Ecuador, sought to commit local authorities to promote strategies for disseminating, training and implementing the SDGs in their areas. However, the evaluation has not been able to obtain evidence of the results of this initiative. The 'Localization of the SDGs' initiative, with a focus on the migrant population in the city of Tulcán, promoted by the Engagement Facility, did manage to assess priority vulnerable groups and incorporate them in the elaboration of the Local Council Agenda, mainstreaming migration in local planning and management.

Finding 16. Democratic society: UNDP participation as an external, reliable and neutral actor, has contributed to strengthening democratic processes in the country, through support for local and national institutions in the development of orderly, legitimate and transparent electoral and government transition processes.

After years of lack of interest on the part of national authorities in UNDP contributions to democratic governance issues, UNDP technical support to the 2021 electoral process, through the 'Assistance to the NEC' project was key to strengthening the NEC and the Electoral Disputes Tribunal (EDT), to develop the results management system for the first and second presidential election rounds.¹⁹² UNDP provided specific support to the transmission system, quick count and database support, aspects that contributed to the legitimacy of the electoral results for citizens and political actors. NEC and EDT, as project partners, stressed that in a context of low legitimacy inherited from the previous elections in 2017, the new elections could lay the foundations to ensure the future stability of the election system. Similarly, project donors assessed that the project objectives were satisfactorily met, and reflected on the orderliness of the electoral process. This intervention was well aligned with the country programme's theory of change, which states that if the electoral process and its institutions (NEC and EDT) are strengthened and supported to ensure better capacity, inclusiveness, transparency and dialogue, then the electoral process and democracy will be strengthened in Ecuador, as has been the case.

UNDP worked closely with DPPA and the Resident Coordinator on the electoral project, under an established agreement for working arrangements in electoral processes. The project was designed to influence other processes beyond the electoral cycle, supported by manuals for NEC and EDT strategic planning. UNDP convened a multi-stakeholder platform and provided technical support to develop communication strategies and information campaigns to strengthen the credibility and positioning of NEC and EDT, fight fake news and disinformation in collaboration with UNESCO, and fight against gender-based political violence together with UN Women. Officials interviewed noted that support for strengthening both institutions was framed in terms of capacity-building, inclusiveness, transparency and dialogue. Training and technical support were based on a prior needs assessment, including a risk assessment for the electoral impact of COVID-19. The strengthening of transparency and dialogue was achieved by developing communication strategies, such as the design and production of materials linked to electoral reform and its implications, oriented to the general public. As a result, COVID-19 was not a significant factor in the interruption of activities. NEC and EDT representatives argue that two challenges were overcome. Firstly, staff were able

¹⁹² Project ID 125031.

to adapt to digital platforms for remote working and coordination of activities. Secondly, the project made optimal use of available resources despite State budget cuts, including planning, monitoring and the use of technological resources, and overall, budget restrictions did not disrupt the electoral process.

Under the Engagement Facility, UNDP accompanied two government transition processes, at local and national levels. This process has been vital for the democratic consolidation of the country, which historically has been characterized by discontinuity and lack of legitimacy of government transition processes. Thus, in the pre-handover process, local technical assistance was provided for the change of government in the Metropolitan District of Quito. The application of the UNDP 'SIGOB' methodology enabled a reduction in the time and cost of learning and provided the incoming Government with a roadmap based on the definition of priorities for strategies, which should endure. This assistance allowed for subsequent work on the transition of the Government at the national level in 2021.¹⁹³ This pre-handover, and the full handover process, took place through the technical wing of the Transition Committee, supported by UNDP, whose objective was to guarantee the institutional continuity of the most relevant projects, norms, contracts and systems. In this regard, the former Government selected the 'Violet Economy' policy as one of the prime initiatives and transferred it to the new Government. This momentum has been used to initiate anti-corruption work with the new Government. UNDP now has the chance to explore how to open other traditional areas of UNDP work in governance, such as justice, which are highly relevant in the country context.

Efficiency and transparency have also been highlighted in relation to UNDP institutional support to *PetroEcuador*.¹⁹⁴ The project was relevant for achieving an agile, competitive and transparent process of technical evaluation for five emblematic infrastructure projects. UNDP participation guaranteed a transparent bidding process closed to interference, and impartiality in the technical evaluation results, which ensured that the outcomes were not subsequently questioned in a highly politicized environment. Furthermore, UNDP operations made it possible to generate a surplus of \$3.5 million over the budget initially planned by the institution. However, the intervention was *ad hoc*. Even if UNDP strengthened the capacities of PetroEcuador officials in contract management and transparency, this process was not extended to other government institutions or public enterprises with similar weaknesses.¹⁹⁵

2.5 Overall programme implementation

Finding 17. Strategic positioning: UNDP is recognised as an independent entity with a high level of credibility, capable of developing partnerships on a wide range of issues and actors, and as a promoter of gender equality with high capacity for project implementation. However, the fact that UNDP has covered multiple thematic areas broadly may have weakened its image and perceived value to partners.

Most interviewees agreed that UNDP is the United Nations agency with the broadest mandate, and thus has the advantage of a comprehensive approach that covers multiple issues. The organization's added value lies in its technical knowledge, its relationship and convening capacity with national and local public institutions and private actors, its credibility and capacity to respond to crucial challenges for the country. This has been demonstrated for strategic planning and design,¹⁹⁶ and implementation in response to disasters, governance and socioeconomic crises, with an approach beyond immediate humanitarian response towards longer-term development.

¹⁹³ The transition from President Moreno to President Lasso.

¹⁹⁴ Technical evaluation of projects managed by the Public Hydrocarbon Company of Ecuador - EP Petroecuador project.

¹⁹⁵ A new initiative with the Public Procurement Service was launched midyear 2021 and did not fall within the scope of this ICPE.

¹⁹⁶ With participatory planning exercises (e.g. UNSDCF and CPD) elaborated together with Government, civil society, academia, private sector and other international cooperation partners.

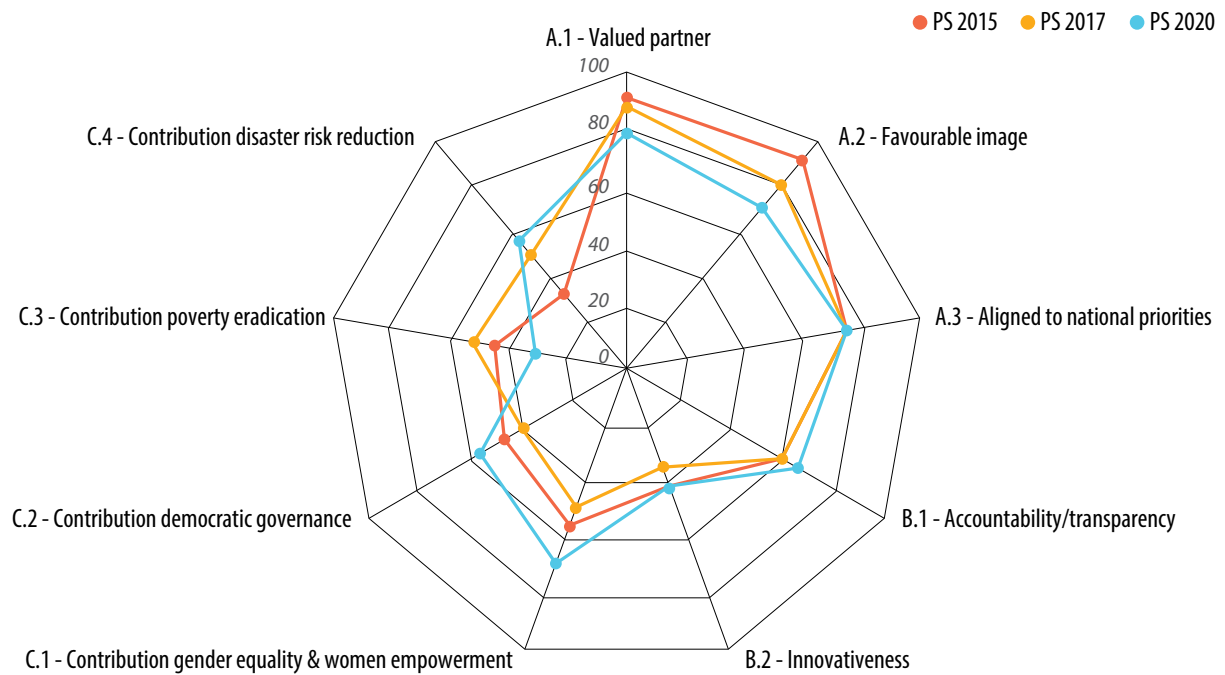
Given the importance and size of the environment portfolio in this programme cycle, a wide range of interviewees confirmed that UNDP is considered a strategic partner in this area. It has achieved relevant positioning to support the Government to implement its environmental agenda and mobilize funds to finance it, including complex global funds such as GEF and GCF. In addition, it has contributed to the fulfilment of international convention requirements (such as CBD, Nagoya and Minamata), and the implementation of projects in different key environmental areas for the country while mainstreaming gender and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

Positioning on governance issues has been marked by the UNDP role in the October 2019 crisis, electoral support in 2020-21, government transition processes and the PDNA process in response to COVID-19. This programme cycle has opened up previously closed spaces for work on democratic governance with great potential to demonstrate the possibilities of UNDP integrator role. Interventions in social protection and inclusive economic development have succeeded in generating multiple alliances and promoting relevant issues, such as work with youth and migrants and the economic empowerment of women. However, interventions had difficulty conveying a clear image of the positioning sought by UNDP and how this could contribute to the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty in the country.

This situation is reflected in trends in partner perceptions over time. The perception of the UNDP contribution to certain thematic areas of development has been improving over time, for example in gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), democratic governance and disaster risk reduction (DRR), as seen in Figure 12. These areas reached their highest historical score in 2020. This perception of partners is in line with the results identified in previous findings, with the case of GEWE being the most evident given its cross-cutting nature and the current efforts of UNDP Ecuador to integrate a gender perspective in all programme areas.

However, partners also noted the risks of influencing so many thematic areas and the trade-offs this generates. Most significant is the poor perception of the UNDP role and contribution to poverty reduction in the country. This should drive most efforts and initiatives in the country, as it is directly related to one of the organization's ultimate goals, highlighted in Outcome 1 of the UNDP Strategic Plan. Another trade-off is reflected in the added value as a partner and associated favourable image, both of which have decreased since 2015 and this could be related to staff workload.

FIGURE 12. UNDP Partnership Survey historical data 2015-20



Source: UNDP. Figure elaborated by IEO

Finding 18. Partnerships: UNDP played an effective role in forming multisectoral partnerships, enabling it to address relevant issues with a more holistic perspective.

UNDP Ecuador demonstrated strategic vision when it recognized the critical role of partnerships to pursue sustainable development and remain relevant in a challenging upper middle-income country context. The dynamics of country income classification for the allocation of international resources have been shown to limit the UNDP ability to respond to the complex challenges of middle-income countries.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, UNDP Ecuador did well to develop partnerships and design comprehensive projects with capacity for multisectoral impact, thus broadening possible sources of funding, but as Figure 12 shows, it needs to strengthen its perceived value as a partner.

At national level, the strategic alliances with MAAE and MAG as implementing partners for the *PROAmazonia* programme are a good example. The joint outreach of both institutions achieved a comprehensive scope in terms of policy, sustainable production, sustainable forest management, conservation, restoration and financing. Moreover, under a NIM-supported model requested by the partners, confidence in the UNDP role is reflected in the consecutive projects funded by GEF and GCF. However, this implementation modality creates a significant volume of transactions and workload and, despite the reluctance of authorities, UNDP is in a position to foster the use of full national implementation modalities.

The trust of the Technical Planning Secretariat and the National Secretariat of Risk Management was also crucial to coordinate the work of a large spectrum of government institutions.¹⁹⁸ The technical capacities and experience of the United Nations country team and the World Bank were used to develop the PDNA.

¹⁹⁷ UNDP IEO (2020), Evaluation of UNDP development cooperation in middle-income countries.

¹⁹⁸ See PDNA Report for the full list of actors: <https://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2020/12/Eval-Soc-Econ-10-Dic-ok.pdf>.

New partnerships with public actors, such as SENESCYT, EEQ or the Guayaquil local authority, have made it possible to diversify the sources of funding for the country programme. The success of these partnerships is associated with UNDP added value in fund management and procurement, which allows room for more ambitious development objectives. Partnerships with the private sector, the Global Compact and multiple business associations and financial institutions, give UNDP a unique position *vis-à-vis* other United Nations country team agencies to involve these actors in its initiatives.

Partnerships with other United Nations agencies have made it possible to start addressing complex issues that are highly relevant to the country from a more comprehensive perspective, such as chronic child malnutrition.¹⁹⁹ Joint actions with WFP and UNICEF have enabled the financing of the Joint SDG Fund and boosted the involvement of multiple national and local authorities, public bodies, private sector, academia, civil society and three international financial institutions (IFIs): World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and CAF. Such joint interagency initiatives are crucial to tackling complex problems and reinforcing external perceptions of coherence. Otherwise, as different interviewees pointed out, there is a perception that UNDP works on many thematic areas simultaneously, sometimes perceived as a duplication of effort or resulting in competition for funds.

In terms of other international actors, partnerships with the EU, the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and the Swiss Embassy stand out. These have allowed UNDP to work on strategic issues such as institutional strengthening of electoral authorities and proper management of the latest electoral processes. Interviewees highlighted the legitimacy and impartiality of UNDP as its added value for these types of projects, which relate to the basic foundations of the State and national sovereignty. Partnerships with IFIs have also enabled work on resilience and climate risks (CAF), youth, social protection and migrants (World Bank).

Finding 19. Finance: Over the 2019-22 programme cycle, UNDP Ecuador improved its financial performance, increasing both the programme budget and expenditure, and maintained a high overall execution rate. Resources primarily addressed sustainable natural resource management and the COVID-19 response.

The UNDP programme budget for the current CPD cycle (2019-22) is almost double that of the previous cycle (2015-18).²⁰⁰ Over the previous period, the UNDP programme budget was around \$11 million per year, while in the current cycle (2019-22), it maintained a growth trend, reaching its peak in 2021 at \$47.1 million (see Figure 13). The 2016 earthquake response was a challenge to the Ecuador country office, as well as delivery delays generated by the country's 2017 general elections.²⁰¹ However, in 2018 the programme benefited from a budget allocation of \$20.9 million due to a process of consolidation and growth of the programme portfolio and the mobilization of resources, mostly from GCF and GEF.

By July 2021,²⁰² the Ecuador country office had managed to mobilize 94 percent (\$106.7 million) of the total financial planned resources (\$113.4) of its CPD for the whole programme cycle. The programme budget was 99 percent funded by non-core resources, relying on vertical trust funds (54 percent), government cost-sharing (36 percent) and bilateral/ multilateral funds (10 percent). Throughout this cycle, resources were mainly allocated to the sustainable natural resource management portfolio (Outcome 2) with \$75.9 million, and the COVID-19 response and impact mitigation with \$16.7 million.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ UNDP is a member of the interagency group on Child Stunting, with UNICEF, WFP, FAO and PAHO.

²⁰⁰ A 94 percent increase from the budget of \$54.91 million (2015-18 cycle) to the budget of \$106.71 million (2019-22 cycle).

²⁰¹ 2018 and 2019 Integrated Work Plans Ecuador, validated through interviews.

²⁰² The data for this financial analysis was extracted from PowerBI/ATLAS as of 21 July 2021.

²⁰³ Channelled by the "Emergency Response to COVID-19" project.

Vertical trust funds have been the most prominent donors to the UNDP portfolio (2019-21), with \$56.5 million mobilized. GCF accounted for \$20.2 million of expenditure, representing 30 percent of total expenditure for the 2019-21 CPD period. The GEF Trust Fund was the second largest contributor with \$17.8 million. However, in contrast with the previous cycle, the country office managed to significantly mobilize and increase government cost-sharing resources for this period (See Figure 14), underlining its capacity to administrate and manage national or local funds. Expenditure from three donors, the Guayaquil local authority with \$10.4 million, the Quito Electric Company with \$7.2 million, and SENESCYT with \$3.0 million, represented 31 percent of total programme expenditure.

UNDP also showed an increasing trend in expenditure, with a growth of 46 percent in the current cycle over the previous period.²⁰⁴ In 2020, expenditure reached its highest annual value, at \$27.7 million, with two projects accounting for half of this: The GCF *PROAmazonia* programme (29 percent); and the COVID-19 response (21 percent).²⁰⁵

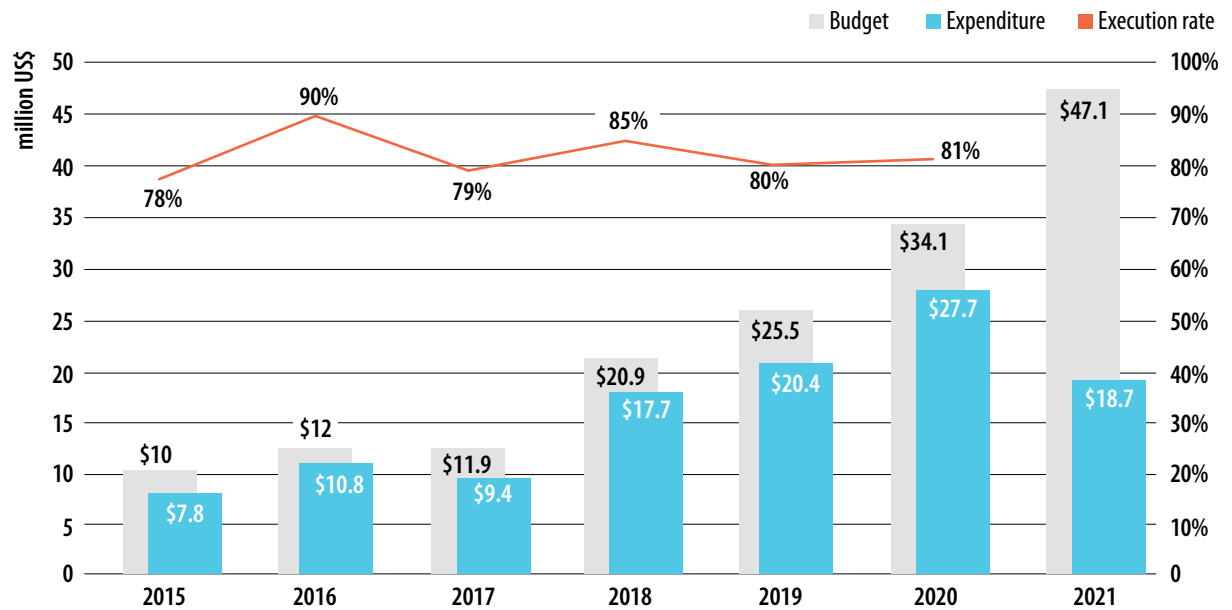
The UNDP execution rate has remained high in both cycles, averaging 82 percent from 2015 to 2020. Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 barely affected UNDP effectiveness in delivery, which reached 81 percent in 2020. Interviews and desk review revealed that the key drivers for this have been: (i) the high execution rate of the sustainable natural resource management area (Outcome 2) at 87 percent, and its solid partnership with MAAE and MAG; (ii) the country office capacity to adapt to higher resource allocation than the previous cycle; and (iii) the creation of the delivery monitoring group, with participation of programme, finance and procurement personnel, led by the Deputy Resident Representative and the Operations Manager. This group has closely monitored programme and operational efficiency, identified bottlenecks and taken necessary actions.

To ensure financial sustainability, since 2019 UNDP Ecuador has positioned itself more strategically with some key donors to diversify its funding sources. The country office reached out to national and subnational governments (e.g. the Guayaquil local authority), IFIs (CAF, World Bank) and bilateral donors (Spain, Switzerland and Italy). This led to greater balancing of the portfolio, with approximately 50 percent from vertical funds and 50 percent from other resources. In addition, the partnership with the EU has grown to cover the implementation of electoral programmes, prevention of GBV and socioeconomic integration of migrants. UNDP has continued to present new proposals to vertical funds to implement projects in the area of sustainable natural resource management, but must continue to accompany this with other initiatives to balance funding sources and avoid risks.

²⁰⁴ A 46 percent increase from expenditure of \$45.68 million (2015-18 cycle) to expenditure of \$66.78 million (2019-22 cycle).

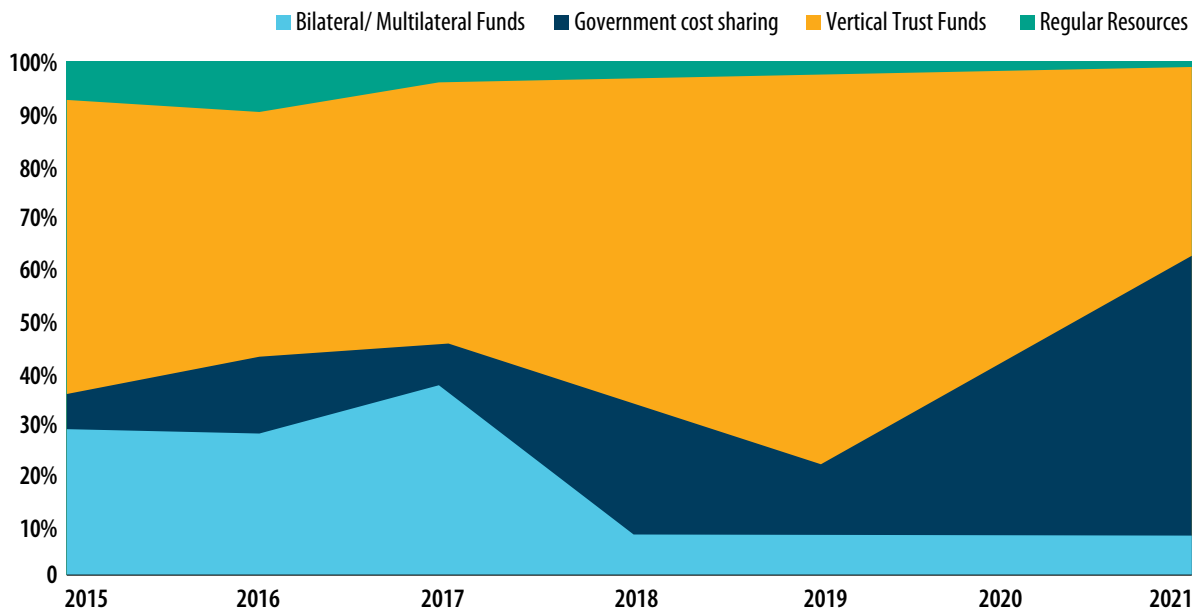
²⁰⁵ In 2020, expenditure was: \$8 million to the “*Green Climate Fund PROAmazonia programme*” (Project ID 00100778) and \$5.6 million to the “*Emergency Response to COVID-19*” (Project ID 00126803 and Output ID 00126803) projects.

FIGURE 13. UNDP Ecuador programme budget and expenditure (2015-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS Data as of 21 July 2021

FIGURE 14. Distribution of programme expenditure by fund source (2015-21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS Data as of 21 July 2021

Finding 20. Human resources and operations: The country office structure has not evolved at the same pace as the size and scope of its programme. Its capacity to respond to the growth in financial resources, and the subsequent increase in internal and external demands, has come at the cost of human resource commitment and attrition, with ongoing but limited organizational strengthening to respond to the new programme reality, and this puts future performance in both programme and operations at risk.

The increase in mobilized resources and expenditure and challenges of teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic have generated a higher workload, which was not met with an increase in the number of staff or realignment of the office structure to respond to internal and external demands.²⁰⁶ From the programme side, this can be well demonstrated by the case of *PROAmazonía*. The number of UNDP staff providing support, advice, monitoring and quality assurance to the programme (three) has not changed since 2017, while the number of staff working on the programme has grown from ten to 115 over the same period.²⁰⁷ This imbalance has led to work overload and burdensome administrative processes that take time away from technical advice.

From an operational perspective, the procurement unit underwent restructuring to improve its efficiency, opting for the specialization of functions in its team and adding a new member during this programme period.²⁰⁸ However, this unit continues to face a high volume of work due to the large number of procurement processes generated by some projects and new corporate operational initiatives. As a result, processes took longer than planned. Other units have remained without reinforcements in terms of personnel, with the subsequent potential risk of bottlenecks and delays. For example, the finance team has only two people to process an estimated 15,000 payments per year. The human resources team is equally small and overburdened by the requirements of implementing the new recruitment modalities (I/N-PSA).

Responsibility for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is shared between different staff, which does not add up to the equivalent of one full-time dedicated resource.²⁰⁹ The senior officer dedicated to M&E is also working as an operations manager, with the resulting time constraints. The country office is implementing a transformation plan approved by RBLAC in 2021, but the recruitment process had not been completed at the time of this evaluation. The importance of this resource is related to its ability to strengthen project results frameworks and contribute to the monitoring and sustainability of results achieved, which are weaknesses identified in several findings of this report. It also relates to an internal weakness identified in the desk review and interviews, regarding the limited documentation and use of lessons learned from projects and the low exploitation of opportunities arising from this process, given the high workload and requirements for project monitoring and follow-up by RBLAC and headquarters.

While recognizing the high motivation, teamwork and capacity to respond to work demands of UNDP staff, internal and external interviewees expressed their concern that increased workloads could generate burnout. The evaluation team identified that the country office is aware of the current challenges in its structure and capacity, and recognizes the need to enhance its ability to take care of staff wellbeing. In response to the Global Staff Survey results, the country office engaged with managers and teams in areas where workplace challenges were identified, and the reported results were: (i) the development of induction programme and manual for new personnel; (ii) revised Standard Operating Procedures;²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ All UNDP and project staff took up teleworking as of 16 March 2020. Under this scheme, digital tools and systems, equipment and technical support were strengthened so as not to slow down productivity despite the challenges.

²⁰⁷ One Programme Officer, One Programme Associate and One Project Technician. Recently supported by one UNV volunteer in 2021.

²⁰⁸ A team of five: one Procurement Associate, one Procurement Assistant and three Assistants.

²⁰⁹ Four resources are reported in the ROAR 2020 dedicated to monitoring, but with a cumulative total of 95 percent of one person's time. For the evaluation function the cumulative reported time is only 30 percent.

²¹⁰ An internal survey of the country team considers that the timelines set out in the new Standard Operating Procedures are unrealistic.

(iii) monthly information and regular meetings with the staff on key topics including action plans and SDG progress; (iv) implementation of a 'greening the office' initiative; (v) the creation of stress management groups (mindfulness, health care); (vi) the promotion of professional development through assignments and missions to support other country and regional offices and the New York headquarters.²¹¹

Finding 21. Mainstreaming gender equality: Efforts to mainstream GEWE in UNDP projects and programmes and within the country office environment resulted in the office being awarded the UNDP silver Gender Equality Seal.

UNDP Ecuador participated in the internal 'Gender Equality Seal' programme 2018-19, with the aim of supporting Ecuador's sustainable development with a gender perspective, strengthening internal country office processes and enhancing gender mainstreaming. Interviews and monitoring reports show that the country office strengthened its capacity for effective gender mainstreaming in projects, programmes, operations, communications and human resources through this programme. As a result, the country office earned a silver Gender Equality Seal in 2020.²¹²

To achieve the silver award, the country office recruited a full-time gender specialist in 2018. She has supported the leadership, advocacy and positioning of the UNDP Ecuador Gender Equality Strategy 2018-21, and its mainstreaming into programmatic and operational areas, and conducted training in partnership with the human resources team.²¹³ Subsequently, an interdisciplinary gender focal group was established, led by the Deputy Resident Representative, to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender equality and support the implementation of the Internal Gender Equality Seal programme 2018-19.²¹⁴

Another critical factor for the achievement of the silver Gender Seal has been the development and implementation of the country office's Gender Equality Strategy 2019-22 and Gender Action Plan, both aligned to corporate and global policies.²¹⁵ The Strategy was developed with staff in a participatory manner through workshops, interviews and training. It focuses on four priority actions: (i) the eradication of GBV; (ii) women's economic empowerment; (iii) women's participation in decision-making in male-dominated fields; and (iv) the incorporation of a gender perspective into disaster risk management policies and strategies.²¹⁶ As a result, UNDP gender actions have been mainstreamed across all four outcome areas. Gender equality has been an objective and a means to leverage development solutions within the framework of the programme results of "poverty eradication and acceleration of structural transformations for sustainable development".²¹⁷

The use of sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis and the incorporation of gender activities into project documents was promoted.²¹⁸ The country office also collaborated with national partners to achieve gender equality goals, participated in the GEWE and Human Rights interagency coordination group, and fostered strategic partnerships with specialized agencies such as UN Women and other international actors.²¹⁹

²¹¹ Detail assignments and support missions to other country offices included, Haiti, Peru and Bahamas, as well as support to Regional Bureaus (Bangkok) and the New York Headquarters.

²¹² In 2020, UNDP Ecuador achieved a final score of 82 percent, fulfilling 31 out of 38 benchmarks. This constituted a significant improvement from a baseline score of 38 percent (12 of the 32 benchmarks) in 2018.

²¹³ Training focused on various gender topics such as gender inclusive language, abuse and exploitation, sexual harassment. Courses on gender mainstreaming on the environment and energy area have been conducted.

²¹⁴ Composed of the gender specialist, programme officers from programmatic and operational areas and other staff from technical units.

²¹⁵ Aligned to the Strategic Plan 2018-21, Global Gender Equality Strategy 2018-21, UNSDCF 2019-22, CPD 2019-22 and SDGs.

²¹⁶ Implementation of the actions of the Gender Equality Strategy 2019-22 were validated in interviews with national and international stakeholders and beneficiaries.

²¹⁷ UNDP Ecuador (2019) Gender Equality Strategy 2019-22.

²¹⁸ UNDP Ecuador (2020) Gender Equality Seal Report Card.

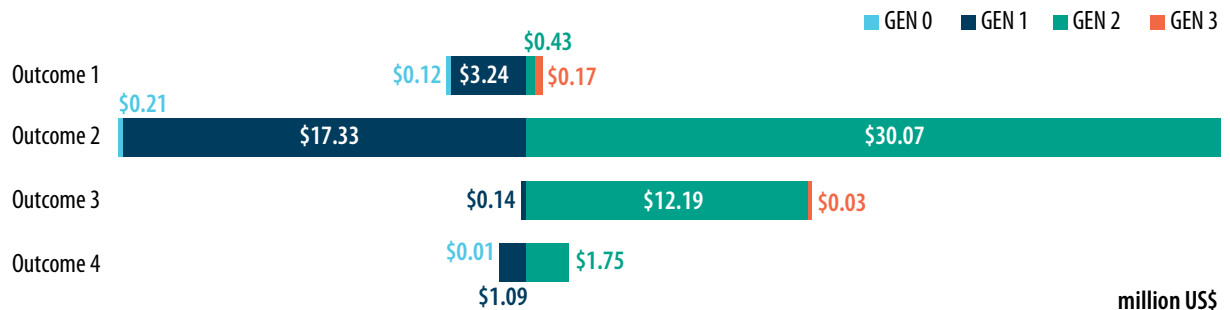
²¹⁹ For the current programme cycle, UNDP Ecuador partnered with CAF, UN Women, UNFPA, UNHCR, IOM.

UNDP supported the development of institutional capacities for gender with a gender-sensitive communication strategy and gender guidelines for the use of non-sexist language. A checklist for developing project documents was created and a solid online and social presence of gender was promoted by the communications, gender and programme teams.

For the current programme cycle, the country office successfully achieved gender parity in its staff (58 percent female and 42 percent male) and senior management (50 percent female, 50 percent male), as well as the appointment of 60 percent female fixed-term employees and 63 percent female permanent employees.²²⁰ In addition, gender was integrated into recruitment, selection and induction processes, and the human resources team implemented work-life balance and family-friendly policies.²²¹ However, the global staff survey still highlights issues with work-life balance and workload distribution for female staff.²²²

Analysis of the gender markers indicates that allocations to outputs with gender equality as the primary objective (GEN3) still only represent 0.3 percent of programme expenditure (\$0.2 million), mostly corresponding to projects on social development and resilience under Outcome 1. Approximately two-thirds of programme expenditure, \$44.4 million, was assigned to outputs with gender equality as a significant objective (GEN2), mostly under Outcome 2 on sustainable natural resource management (see Figure 15). Meanwhile, \$21.8 million was allocated to outputs that were expected to contribute to gender equality in a limited way (GEN1) and \$0.3 million to outputs that were not expected to contribute to gender equality (GEN0). However, analysis of trends in expenditure by gender marker between 2019 and 2020 show an improvement, with a 59 percent increase for GEN2 (reaching \$19.6 million) and 76 percent increase for GEN3 (to \$0.09 million).²²³

FIGURE 15. Expenditure by gender marker and outcome (2019–21)



Source: PowerBI/ATLAS. Data as of 21 July 2021.

²²⁰ UNDP Ecuador Gender Executive Snapshot. http://atlas-snapshot.undp.org/?report=hr_gender_distribution&unit=ecu.

²²¹ As a result, selection criteria with a gender consideration have been implemented, minimum gender knowledge requirement has been incorporated in the Terms of Reference for new employees, and induction courses are conducted for new employees.

²²² Since less than half of women responded favourably to the fact that the workload is manageable and have enough time to complete all tasks within working hours (2020 GSS Question 73) and that the workload is distributed fairly in the office (2020 GSS Question 74).

²²³ Expenditure for 2019-20 is considered since expenditure in 2021 would present a skewed picture when accessed as of 21 July 2021.

Finding 22. South-South cooperation: UNDP promoted cross-border collaboration and the exchange of experiences between countries, with specific achievements at output level. However, SSC initiatives were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent restrictions on international mobility.

The CPD proposed SSC as one of its cross-cutting axes, and the country office in Ecuador has promoted it through various projects, including one dedicated project. The *'Promoting South-South and Triangular Cooperation'* project aims to create a National SSC Fund as a strategic instrument to support horizontal cooperation of institutions and civil servants.²²⁴ The approach is relevant, given the country's lack of processes and resources for the effective promotion of SSC or efficient interinstitutional coordination. The Fund has been financed through a debt-swap programme with Italy, and UNDP was assigned to its administration. Interviews highlighted that UNDP trust and transparency were an added value in this framework. However, the Fund could not be implemented because of COVID-19 restrictions, and the project requested an extension until 2022.²²⁵

Through various projects, UNDP managed to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences between countries, which interviewees recognised as substantial contributions which added value to project results. For example, in the area of environment, there were exchanges with Colombia and Peru concerning their transboundary basins and fisheries, with Costa Rica, Indonesia and the Philippines concerning marine biodiversity, and with Chile on mining and climate change. Under the framework of REDD+, exchanges were developed with Brazil on social and environmental evaluation and social and environmental management plans. An exchange was facilitated with Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Honduras on methodologies for the estimation of forest degradation, and with Mexico related to the SGP on bio-corridor approaches and community responses to COVID-19.

Governance interventions also benefited from transnational collaboration, with relevant results. Of particular note was the support provided by Bolivia and Costa Rica with the mobilization of two information technology experts who made three technical assistance visits to Ecuador to support the NEC. They provided technical advice for tests and simulations, fine-tuning the computer system, which ultimately contributed to the successful counting and transmission of the results of the country's presidential elections.

²²⁴ Project ID 123906.

²²⁵ The extension was accepted and being formalized at the time of this evaluation.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



This chapter presents the evaluation conclusions on UNDP performance and contributions to development results in Ecuador, as well as the recommendations and management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. By using its capacity to mobilize resources and its leadership to articulate joint responses with other United Nations agencies and national partners, UNDP has expanded its programme and responded to the emerging priorities and emergencies in the country. However, by broadening its work across different thematic areas, UNDP may be at risk of spreading its efforts too thin, or not being able to ensure the sustainability of results.

During the current programme cycle, UNDP Ecuador was able to mobilize significantly more resources than initially planned in its CPD, to almost double the size of the portfolio under the previous programme cycle. This success was made possible by its reputation as an independent and trusted organization and its leadership and capacity to address national crises, whether natural and social, including the response to COVID-19. Moreover, UNDP has also been able to position itself in strategic areas for the State, such as sustainable natural resource management, strengthening democracy and orderly transition of government. This has enabled UNDP to capitalize on a wide range of partnerships with multiple stakeholders relevant to development in Ecuador. Although UNDP interventions have had mixed implementation approaches, those executed under NIM -supported modality stand out for their significant budget and scope, but further efforts are required in terms of ensuring the sustainability of results. The UNDP commitment to promoting the SDGs, and the breadth of its mandate, has enabled multisectoral work. But the diversity of initiatives and the resulting burden on resources have had repercussions both on the internal response capacity and the external perception of UNDP positioning and value as a partner, which has been in decline since 2015. The country context required UNDP to do more in terms of poverty reduction.

Conclusion 2. The structure and size of the country office is strained due to the current programme priorities and operational needs. Adjustments are ongoing, but the challenges generated by COVID-19 and the new dynamics of teleworking impacted staff workloads significantly.

Responding to multisectoral strategic positioning needs, maintaining the performance of a continuously growing portfolio of projects and corporate requirements, and responding to COVID-19 both in existing projects as well as the design and launch of new initiatives, have been major challenges for the country office. It has met these challenges with great effectiveness, but the workload has placed heavy demands and strain on all office staff, particularly in thematic areas that have not yet transitioned to full NIM. On the outbreak of COVID-19, country office management took the appropriate decision to safeguard lives and health and prioritize teleworking, suspending travel and fieldwork to prevent the spread of the virus and avoid risks. These measures have not stopped the programme from performing effectively since the beginning of the pandemic, and the office is implementing a transformation plan to meet current challenges. In that sense, internal and external actors underline the need for further reinforcement and support measures at both programme and operational levels to avoid staff attrition or work overload detracting from UNDP value and effectiveness.

Conclusion 3. The UNDP programme in Ecuador stands out for the scale of its environment and sustainable natural resource management portfolio. Effective resource mobilization has allowed the country office to implement a cohesive environmental portfolio, underpinned by vertical funds. Interventions have contributed to both local and global environmental benefits, yet the country context, institutional weaknesses and the long-term perspective for results call for greater efforts to monitor and ensure the sustainability of interventions.

Given the richness of Ecuador's ecosystems, with natural areas of international importance such as the Amazon rainforest and the Galapagos Islands, development efforts require a solid environmental sustainability dimension. UNDP has positioned itself as a leading actor for developing and implementing environmental projects that have contributed to the sustainable management of forests and natural resources. It has also contributed to the conservation of land and marine biodiversity, the proper control of chemicals and pollutants and mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. The environment portfolio has pursued a holistic approach to interventions, emphasising poverty reduction and livelihood strengthening, as well as linkages to innovation and economic transformation. UNDP technical assistance to mobilising and implementing green vertical fund resources has been vital to achieving this, but challenges remain. An extraction-based production structure, institutions constrained by fiscal deficit and the long-term perspective needed to achieve results require the portfolio to strengthen the causal linkages of interventions to higher-level goals, and the strategies for monitoring and sustaining results.

Conclusion 4. UNDP work in governance achieved relevant outcomes for strengthening democracy in Ecuador. Despite its newness and limited funds, this has opened up previously unavailable areas of intervention. Results in economic development were more dispersed but allowed for synergy and, in the case of social protection and inclusion, were limited but boosted high potential partnerships and innovation.

The fields of governance and inclusive development have operated separately from the environmental area, despite shared realities, such as a national context in great need of support, a weak institutional framework and high turnover of government counterparts. These fields have faced historical reluctance from international actors, significant budgetary restrictions and limited international donors. However, this programme cycle has opened up promising work spaces. UNDP work has had highly relevant effects, such as assistance to the electoral process and government transition, which have strengthened the country's democratic institutions and contributed to the legitimacy of the electoral process. In other areas, such as social protection and inclusion, the results have been less far-reaching and more limited or process-oriented, but still reinforced strategic partnerships with great potential, such as with the World Bank. These have facilitated spaces for experimentation and innovation with a view to social integration and resilience in the face of COVID-19. Synergies between programme areas have been promoted, enabling relevant results such as those obtained in economic empowerment within the environmental programmes, demonstrating the potential for reciprocal benefits and the need for multidimensional solutions to solve complex problems.

Conclusion 5. UNDP effectively leveraged its comparative advantages to respond to initial needs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP leadership and experience in emergency management, and its ability to coordinate actors, enabled the Government to draw on the PDNA methodology to guide recovery. UNDP efficiency in fund management and procurement allowed it to address the urgent needs of vulnerable populations, and the adaptation of methodologies for virtual spaces allowed it to boost businesses and livelihoods. However, few of the structural needs identified in the PDNA have yet been backed up by the necessary investments and monitoring to ensure that the desired socioeconomic development outcomes are achieved and that no one is left behind.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences for the population of Ecuador, as the management of certain essential public services collapsed, as seen in Guayaquil. Given the impact, the rapid response provided by UNDP, coordinated by the United Nations country team and responding to emergency needs and demand, was relevant. UNDP responded to specific requirements, such as the supply of food kits for vulnerable populations in Guayaquil. It managed to adapt its methodologies and generate tools, such as *En Marcha Digital* which has been used and replicated throughout the country and in neighbouring countries to support the economic reactivation of businesses.

The UNDP role in the elaboration of the PDNA is noteworthy for its strategic value. This tool has provided the country with up-to-date socioeconomic information to guide public policy priorities and decisions. A successful example of this is the Vice-presidency's drive to eradicate chronic child malnutrition, which has enabled a joint project between WFP, UNICEF and UNDP with funding from the Joint SDG Fund and the involvement of multiple national and international actors. However, there is little evidence that UNDP and partners managed to ensure that the needs assessment informed corresponding plans and investments to implement a well-funded socioeconomic plan to respond to the consequences of COVID-19 for the country's most vulnerable populations. Neither is it clear how UNDP is leveraging the experience and lessons from its flexible and agile strategic planning and implementation in response to the pandemic for other areas of work.

Conclusion 6. UNDP has successfully mainstreamed gender throughout its programme, promoting gender equality, women's economic empowerment and the reduction of GBV. The programme has fostered potentially transformative initiatives, yet the complex nature of gender inequalities requires additional efforts to address the root causes and achieve more far-reaching and sustainable results.

Overall, UNDP has made relevant contributions to GEWE in the country and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The holistic commitment and engagement of UNDP country office senior management to gender equality was fundamental to achieve the UNDP silver Gender Equality Seal and the formalization of strategic alliances. Interventions still lack the breadth and depth to change norms, cultural values, power structures and the root causes of gender inequalities, but some do have promising transformative potential. Efforts to reduce GBV could be gender transformative, thanks to the Spotlight Initiative, and potential synergy with the governance portfolio and the role of CSOs. Gender-based political violence and women's political rights and parity were addressed, through promoting electoral reforms, capacity-building and national awareness. Results achieved under the sustainable natural resource management portfolio provided significant technical support to strengthen institutional capacity, mechanisms and frameworks to foster women's participation and leadership in male-dominated fields, paving the way for transformative changes. UNDP technical assistance and training were vital in accelerating gender equality in sustainable natural resource management and promoting women's economic empowerment, in synergy with the economic inclusion and livelihoods portfolio. UNDP promotion of women's economic empowerment and employment opportunities directly helped women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender was mainstreamed in PDOTs at local level, and upstream into policy making for climate change initiatives such as the NDC. Likewise, the '*National Violet Economy*' policy has the potential to increase economic empowerment and equitable opportunities for women, change social norms and secure transformative results.

3.2 Recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.



UNDP should continue to capitalize on its positioning and added value in Ecuador, supporting the country in the identification, mobilization and execution of resources for the implementation of strategic interventions to address poverty reduction and the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19, as well as upcoming fiscal and environmental challenges that pose a serious threat to social equity, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

UNDP has played a leading role in accessing and coordinating national and international actors to implement highly relevant interventions in Ecuador. However, for the new programme cycle, UNDP needs to leverage its experience and strategic positioning in terms of governance, elections, biodiversity conservation, natural resource management, climate change and the SDGs to strengthen and expand partnerships, mobilize public and private resources and deepen its focus on transformative development interventions for the country. In addition, it must continue to leverage its comparative advantages, especially in driving the sustainability of achieved and future results. It should undertake a review of factors affecting sustainability and an assessment of UNDP capacity to address them. It should maximize the benefits of integrating the specialized mandates of other United Nations agencies, similar to that done to tackle chronic child malnutrition, and reinforce efforts to seize the opportunities arising from working in collaboration with IFIs, such as with the World Bank to address social protection, youth and migration issues.

Management response: **Accepted**



The country office aims to play an important role in helping Ecuador to achieve significant advances on the SDGs. We will continue supporting national priorities advocating for the sustainability of results; creating strategic alliances with key partners (government, donors, United Nations agencies, IFIs, NGOs and civil society) and leading programmatic efforts to: i) build democratic governance, rule of law and inclusive institutions, (ii) reduce inequalities and exclusion, eradicate poverty and build resilience; and (iii) support sustainable natural resource management and environmental initiatives.

| Key action(s) | Time frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking* | |
|---|------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 1.1 Through a consultative process, including different stakeholders, the office will ensure that the new CPD is aligned with national development priorities, accordingly with the National Development Plan and the new UNSDCF. The CPD will be the framework to strengthen the positioning and added value of UNDP in Ecuador. | July 2022 | Senior management, Programme Units. | Under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, the country team has conducted the Common Country Assessment as a previous step to elaborate the UNSDCF. | Not started. |

RECOMMENDATION 2.



UNDP should adapt its office structure to the realities of the programme it implements. It should consider strengthening the programme and operations areas to allow for more realistic distribution of workloads, avoiding the risk of bottlenecks and delays, and continue to look after staff health and motivation.

Corporate calls to care for the physical and mental health of all office staff have been continuous since the start of the pandemic, and as it drags on, these calls have become more relevant due to accumulated fatigue, stress and psychological distress. The country office must maximize the opportunities arising from the 'People for 2030' strategy and promote measures that enable staff to achieve a better work-life balance, and increase motivation and job satisfaction. At the workload level, the office needs to undertake a thorough reflection and analysis covering processes, time requirements and staffing available for implementation in the context of its growing project portfolio and the new work realities arising from the pandemic. It should encourage the transition to full NIM to reduce the burden of internal processes. Likewise, it should exploit possibilities for operational improvement arising from the clustering process at corporate level. The office needs to assess and consider strengthening the areas of procurement, finance, human resources and M&E. It should also continue to decentralize administrative processes to project units to the extent permitted by internal regulations, optimize workloads at operations and programme levels and free up time for strategic advice and technical oversight of progress.

Management response: **Accepted**



There are ongoing efforts that aim to achieve a better work-life balance, increased motivation and job satisfaction. The country office senior management is committed to this purpose and will continue to do so.

The office has implemented the transformation plan approved by RBLAC in 2021 that aims to strengthen the office structure. This includes hiring of an M&E position, among other actions, which at the time of the evaluation was in process. Other operational enhancements will be analysed once the corporate clustering is fully operational.

The size of the office and organizational structure is a matter for in-depth analysis, including cost structures, which the evaluation team has not carried out. In comparison to other office structures in the region and their delivery levels which are used as benchmarks, the office has an adequate size. At present, its sustainability does not represent challenges.

Despite limitations to hiring additional staff (fixed-term appointment), the country office has made efforts to adapt its structure and the senior management will continue to address this issue. The country office has managed to mobilize resources for Service Contracts, Individual Contract, National Personnel Services Agreement (NPSA) and United Nations Volunteers in essential areas (Procurement, Finance, Communications, Human Resources and Programmes). To note: the example given, *ProAmazonia*, has several dedicated persons within the programme unit under different contract modalities.

The issue of excessive workload is a complex issue. The country office Standard Operating Procedures to enhance workflows have been reviewed, but there are several dimensions that should be carefully analyzed for a comprehensive understanding:

1. The increase in workload is due not only to the growth of the programme and its delivery, but also responds to: a) the challenges of teleworking during the pandemic; as well as b) to attend and implement a number of new corporate operational initiatives (on the operational side, e.g. introduction of new a contract form (NPSA) and Clustering of services). On the human resources side, this was compounded by the COVID-19 vaccination process of United Nations personnel.
2. Another factor is that the country office business model mainly uses DIM and support to NIM modalities, creating significant volumes of transactions and workloads. Despite efforts to transition towards full NIM, the enabling conditions and government capacities do not yet allow for transiting towards this modality.
3. On the programme side, it should be noted that the functions of programme staff should be primarily linked to oversight and accompanying actions – implementing units in projects have the main responsibility for execution

Recognizing the challenge with workloads during the pandemic, the senior management has paid special attention to mental health/ mindfulness, several activities were and are being carried out, including the action plan that responds to the 2019 Global Staff Survey.

| Key action(s) | Time frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|--|---------------|---------------------|---|---------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 2.1 Finalize the implementation of the Transformation Plan approved in 2021 to strengthen the office structure, including the reclassification of a managerial position and its reassessment at the corporate level and complete the hiring of some key positions that have been vacant and are part of the country office organigram. | February 2022 | Human resources | These actions have been taking place since first semester 2021. | Ongoing |
| 2.2 Conduct a rationale of operational enhancements and implement the 2019 Global Staff Survey Action Plan, the timing of which is appropriate now that the corporate clustering is fully operational. | October 2022 | Human Resources | These actions have been taking place since first semester 2021. | Ongoing |

RECOMMENDATION 3.



UNDP should leverage its unique strategic positioning on the environment to continue expanding and reinforcing biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management approaches, climate change interventions and the linkages between sustainable development, resilience and poverty reduction.

Leadership on environmental issues should allow for expanded synergies. The next programme should jointly focus on responding to the effects of the COVID-19 socioeconomic crisis on the most vulnerable sectors of the population *and* the global environmental crisis due to biodiversity decline and climate change and its impacts on Ecuador's various ecosystems and natural resources. Causal analyses of interventions and the specific characteristics of national ecosystems need to be deepened to prove project hypotheses, achieve more transformational impacts in terms of global environmental benefits, and increase effectiveness in meeting the challenges of climate change and biodiversity decline in Ecuador. UNDP should encourage and facilitate learning among projects. The next CPD should strengthen its indicator system and monitoring and sustainability strategies, to showcase its higher-level environmental goals and its inclusive approach, livelihoods promotion and contributions to poverty reduction. The environmental portfolio can also expand opportunities to apply nature-based solutions for DRR and resilience.

Management response: **Accepted**



UNDP will leverage its strategic positioning as a key actor in the country to continue supporting actions on the environment and energy areas, in particular: conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems (including landscape management approach), climate change, DRR and resilience, sustainable energy and energy efficiency, pollution – management of chemicals and hazardous substances, sustainable fisheries, sustainable production and livelihoods, integrated water resource management, green finance and green recovery. Greater synergies will be fostered with public, private, civil society, academia, national and international financial institutions, amongst others, to leverage resources and complement actions for a higher impact.

The next country programme will further strengthen the linkages between social, economic and environmental matters with a focus on green recovery (in the context of the pandemic), with a reinforced indicator and monitoring system. The portfolio will continue to support and promote integrated and inclusive approaches that contribute to the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems, while promoting sustainable livelihoods that support poverty reduction targets. Likewise, the portfolio will continue to contribute to the design and implementation of public policy (regulations, incentives, budgetary systems, strategies, plans and so on) and capacity strengthening to address the environmental priorities and challenges of the country.

The design process for projects will pay attention to the development of causal analyses that support the theories of change, and on the analysis of the specific characteristics of the country's ecosystems at the time of developing intervention hypotheses, to ensure that project results achieve impacts in terms of global environmental benefits. This will allow for a stronger and more effective means of measurement of those impacts. In this context it is, however, important to highlight that the design of projects follows solid and diligent processes, especially for those funded by vertical funds. GEF and GCF require several technical and financial clearances to ensure coherence of design and causal linkages before approval. Projects are closely monitored and reported following donor and UNDP templates and tracking tools, and results are substantive. Notwithstanding, we will ensure even stronger analysis at the time of project formulation to respond to the recommendation of the evaluators.

Finally, UNDP welcomes the recommendation to encourage and facilitate learning among projects, but also among programmatic and strategic areas. The projects under the Environment and Energy programme hold bi-weekly meetings to provide quick updates on the progress of actions, main milestones, key events and opportunities for capacity-building, information exchange, best practices, etc. Those spaces will be strengthened to promote learning among projects and to include other programmatic areas to share knowledge, methodologies, etc. Moreover, the country office also holds bi-weekly programmatic meetings led by the Resident Representative, which aim to share knowledge and learning among country office programmes and strategic areas (programme areas, Accelerator Lab, DRR, gender, communications, M&E). Those meetings will be maintained and enhanced to facilitate continuous learning.

| Key action(s) | Time frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 3.1 In the framework of the development of the new country programme, UNDP country office will lead a discussion workshop and prepare an analysis, based on the findings of the Common Country Assessment, to define the focus of the environment outcome of the new programme in response to the recommendation of the ICPE that highlights the opportunity to strengthen the country office joint response to the effects of the COVID-19 socioeconomic crisis on the most vulnerable sectors of the population and the global environmental crisis due to biodiversity decline and climate change and its impacts on Ecuador's different ecosystems and natural resources. | April 2022 | Environment and Energy | | Not started |

◀ Recommendation 3 (cont'd)

| | | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------|---|----------------|
| <p>3.2 At the design phase of a project, UNDP country office will ensure that a thorough causal analysis is developed to support the theory of change of the project. In addition, depending on the area of intervention, a deeper analysis of the specific characteristics of ecosystems will be conducted to ensure that the proposed intervention generates effective transformative impact in terms of global environmental benefits and ensures the sustainability of those impacts.</p> | <p>Ongoing depending on pipeline and design process of projects</p> | <p>Environment and Energy</p> | <p>These actions will build on and reinforce on what is already being done.</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>3.3 UNDP country office will continue holding bi-weekly programmatic meetings led by the Resident Representative to facilitate knowledge exchange and learning among the different areas and projects of the country office.</p> <p>On the other hand, the Environment and Energy Programme will continue holding bi-weekly meetings with the projects of the portfolio and will ensure there is an agenda that covers topics that will strengthen the capacities of the team and facilitate learning and knowledge exchange among projects. A follow-up mechanism will be implemented to monitor concrete joint actions.</p> | <p>Ongoing (December 2022)</p> | <p>Programme Units</p> | <p>Those spaces have already been taking place every two weeks and will be strengthened to ensure deeper learning among projects and among areas.</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

◀ Recommendation 3 (cont'd)

| | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| <p>3.4 UNDP country office will articulate actions to expand the portfolio on nature-based solutions for DRR and resilience and its linkage with adaptation to climate change. In that sense, UNDP country office will explore opportunities to mobilize resources (from the Adaptation Fund for instance) to apply risk-based adaptation approaches to support community adaptation to climate change effects. In addition, the area of disaster risk management will proactively participate in initiatives implemented by NDC and NAP to articulate concrete actions such as the business roundtables to identify nature-based solutions for DRR and resilience.</p> | <p>December 2022</p> | <p>Environment and Energy</p> | | <p>Not started</p> |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|

RECOMMENDATION 4.



UNDP needs to build on the lessons and opportunities from the pandemic response to strengthen its programme offer and consolidate its governance and inclusive development area for greater effectiveness.

The experience and information derived from the PDNA should allow UNDP to make coherent programme adjustments for the new programme cycle. Internally, it must design a new theory of change, adapting it to the country's new reality and the UNDP vision and mission for Ecuador. This exercise should enable the consolidation of the area of governance and inclusive development. It should secure its emerging work on anti-corruption and explore the possibility of including complementary and highly relevant areas of work such as justice. In the electoral field, it must continue to strengthen technical capacities, extend the scope of action to future electoral processes at local level and promote the active participation of citizens and civil society to guarantee the sustainability of progress. The drive for sustainable economic development must seek impacts at public policy level and foster partnerships that enable poverty reduction, green recovery, the promotion of the circular economy and the economic inclusion of young people, women and vulnerable households dependent on the informal sector. Innovation should continue to be encouraged and seek to expand the partner ecosystem and move from local initiatives to far-reaching experiments anchored in the programme.

Management response: Accepted



UNDP will update the CPD theory of change and strengthen its programmatic strategy, taking into account the impacts of the pandemic and the priorities defined by the National Development Plan 2021-25. In terms of governance and inclusive development, the country office will work in support of national and local stakeholders in actions that aim at socioeconomic recovery, poverty reduction and inequality, but also towards institutional strengthening for better and more transparent public management. It will build on the foundations of the current projects of sustainable socioeconomic recovery, socioeconomic integration of the population in migration situation, employability of young people and women, financing of the SDGs and initiatives that support the transparency agenda, with which it is already supporting key lines of policy defined by the new Government. In the electoral field, UNDP will expand the scope of its current project to support the electoral cycle, for which it has already negotiated with Spain a new financial contribution. In all these initiatives, UNDP plans to consider innovation and digitalization as key enabling factors.

| Key action(s) | Time frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 4.1 Update the Theory of Change in new CPD. | Aligned with the UNSDCF process – June 2022 | Senior Management and Programme Units | Under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, the Country team has conducted the Common Country Assessment as a previous step to elaborate the UNSDCF. | Not started |

RECOMMENDATION 5.



UNDP efforts and initiatives on gender should focus on policy impact, to address the structural barriers and root causes of gender inequality and contribute to changes in women's rights, gender norms and cultural values. In this respect, the country office should strengthen its programmatic focus on poverty, social inclusion, indigenous women's rights and young women's empowerment, drawing on lessons from current work in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

UNDP Ecuador must take advantage of its good institutional positioning to address the root causes of gender inequality and promote initiatives that engage public authorities and trigger cultural changes in favour of gender equality and women's empowerment. It has already started to do so at the sectoral level, but it needs to expand the lessons learned from these initiatives in traditionally male-dominated sectors to the rest of its spheres of action. UNDP should explicitly and effectively communicate the transformational changes and results achieved by its interventions on gender equality, to make its added value more visible to and acknowledged by external partners. The impact of the pandemic and the need for a gender-sensitive approach to poverty reduction and socioeconomic recovery requires UNDP to place gender equality at the centre of its interventions, thus serving as a programmatic catalyst to trigger changes in social protection, GBV, resilience, political and electoral rights, natural resource management and economic empowerment. UNDP must have a gender agenda beyond the framework of the next CPD to reflect that consolidating progress on gender issues requires structural changes and sustained work with a long-term vision, and have the monitoring and communication tools to provide evidence of progress. In addition, UNDP should continue strengthening the inclusion of vulnerable or traditionally excluded groups in its programmes

Management response: **Accepted**



The UNDP project portfolio has evolved from a timid application of the gender-based approach, towards full mainstreaming, through the incorporation of gender-sensitive tools throughout its programme and including the development of projects and initiatives whose specific objectives are the protection and empowerment of women. This is the case of the regional project financed by CAF and more recently the Spotlight program, both addressing GBV. In both interventions, UNDP works at the level of public policies and institutional reforms. UNDP has also worked on issues of economic inclusion and employability with a gender focus, as well as on local planning that combines an approach to environmental sustainability with the empowerment of women. On this basis, UNDP plans to incorporate other strategic interventions into its next CPD. The country office will seek to strengthen its partnership with other United Nations agencies and with the women's organizations with which it currently cooperates. The objective will be to contribute at the level of policies and cultural practices, removing obstacles to the exercise of women's rights.

◀ Recommendation 5 (cont'd)

| Key action(s) | Time frame | Responsible unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|------------|--------------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| | | | Comments | Status |
| 5.1 Strengthen the work on gender that is carried out in different projects in the office, through a portfolio approach, as proposed in the 2022-25 strategic plan. The different interventions will be reviewed with the idea of aiming to achieve structural transformations that contribute to changing root causes. | April 2023 | Governance and Inclusive Development | | Not started |
| 5.2 Develop 2 new GEN3 projects. | June 2023 | Governance and Inclusive Development | | Not started |

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

ANNEXES



Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12802>

Annex 1. Evaluation terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation framework

Annex 3. People consulted

Annex 4. Documents consulted

Annex 5. Projects reviewed

Annex 6. Status of CPD outcome and output indicators matrix

Annex 7. Diagram of the reconstructed theory of change



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