



# **Formative Evaluation of UNDP's Integration of 'Leaving No One Behind' Principles**

**Terms of Reference**

**December 2021**

## 1. Introduction

1. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is conducting a formative evaluation of the integration of 'Leaving No One Behind' principles in UNDP, as per its Executive Board mandated multiyear programme of work (2022-2025). The evaluation will be implemented during 2022 and presented to the UNDP Executive Board in February 2023. It will examine the coherence, efficiency, relevance and effectiveness of integrating the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) principle throughout UNDP programmes and operations. The intent of the evaluation is to assess the evolving conceptual and operational frameworks used by UNDP to translate LNOB into concrete action, and to make recommendations on how to strengthen UNDP's contribution to results for those left furthest behind. The evaluation is mainly formative, i.e. orientated towards learning and occurring while LNOB integration is being designed or ongoing. It will also include summative elements through an organizational assessment and thematic deep-dives.

2. 'Leaving no one behind' (LNOB) is a central transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Contrary to the human rights-based approach which relates to countries' *legal* obligations, LNOB represents the *political* commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty, discrimination, and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole. The UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination mandated UN entities to focus on three interrelated principles: **equality** of opportunity and outcomes for all groups; **non-discrimination**; and **equity** or fairness (UNCEB, 2017). It is against these principles that the formative evaluation will assess UNDP programmes and operations.

3. This document outlines the scope of the evaluation, methodological options, and operational modalities for a team of in-house and external evaluators.

## 2. Context and Background

### LNOB in the 2030 Agenda

4. In September 2015, the UN Resolution "[Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)" formally launched the SDGs and socialised the notion of Leaving No One Behind: "As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that **no one will be left behind**. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to **reach the furthest behind first**".<sup>i</sup> While the first half of the statement has been widely quoted since, the second half ("reaching the furthest behind first") has received less attention.

5. Early in 2017, the chief executives of all UN entities issued a "[Shared Framework for Action on LNOB](#)" which called for a focus on three related, but distinct principles:

- Equality – defined as "the imperative of moving towards substantive equality of opportunity and outcomes for all groups."

- Non-discrimination – defined as “the prohibition of discrimination against individuals and groups on the grounds identified in international human rights treaties.”
- Equity – refers to fairness in the distribution of costs, benefits and opportunities.<sup>ii</sup>

6. The integration of these principles into UNDP programmes and operations will form the object of this evaluation.

7. Following the inclusion of LNOB as one of six guiding principles for the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2019), the publication “[LNOB: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UNCTs](#)” introduced a step-by-step approach to operationalizing the LNOB pledge as part of UN Country Teams’ support to Member States. This operational guide has been shared within UNDP as official LNOB guidance.<sup>iii</sup>

### **LNOB Integration in UNDP**

8. LNOB is a political commitment to combating the root causes of persistent discrimination, such as gender discrimination, and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, which leaves individuals, families and whole communities marginalized, and excluded. It compels the international community to focus on discrimination and inequalities (often multiple and intersecting) that undermine the agency of people as holders of rights, as well as on the fair distribution of costs, benefits, and opportunities. It requires the generation and disaggregation of additional data to ensure that all grounds of discrimination prohibited under international law and other root causes of inequalities are identified and can be addressed. All of the above have been longstanding areas of interest and expertise of UNDP, as exemplified e.g. by its Human Development Reports and socio-economic impact assessments of the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. Programmatically, LNOB means taking explicit action to address differential access to public services; challenging power structures, social norms and beliefs hampering inclusion; supporting civil society in confronting overt and covert discrimination; and advocating for transformative change distinguished by radical breakthroughs in paradigms, beliefs, and behaviour. UNDP has a long track record in working with historically marginalized groups, e.g. through its gender equality and women’s empowerment interventions, and work with indigenous peoples, LGBTI+ and persons living with disabilities. This work was not always explicitly rights-based or aiming at transformative change, usually for strategic reasons.

10. Integrating the LNOB principle has raised myriad practical challenges in UNDP’s work, including the increasing marginal costs of reaching the last mile, and partnership and procurement models that hamper social contracting at the boundary of the state. These have not yet been systematically assessed.

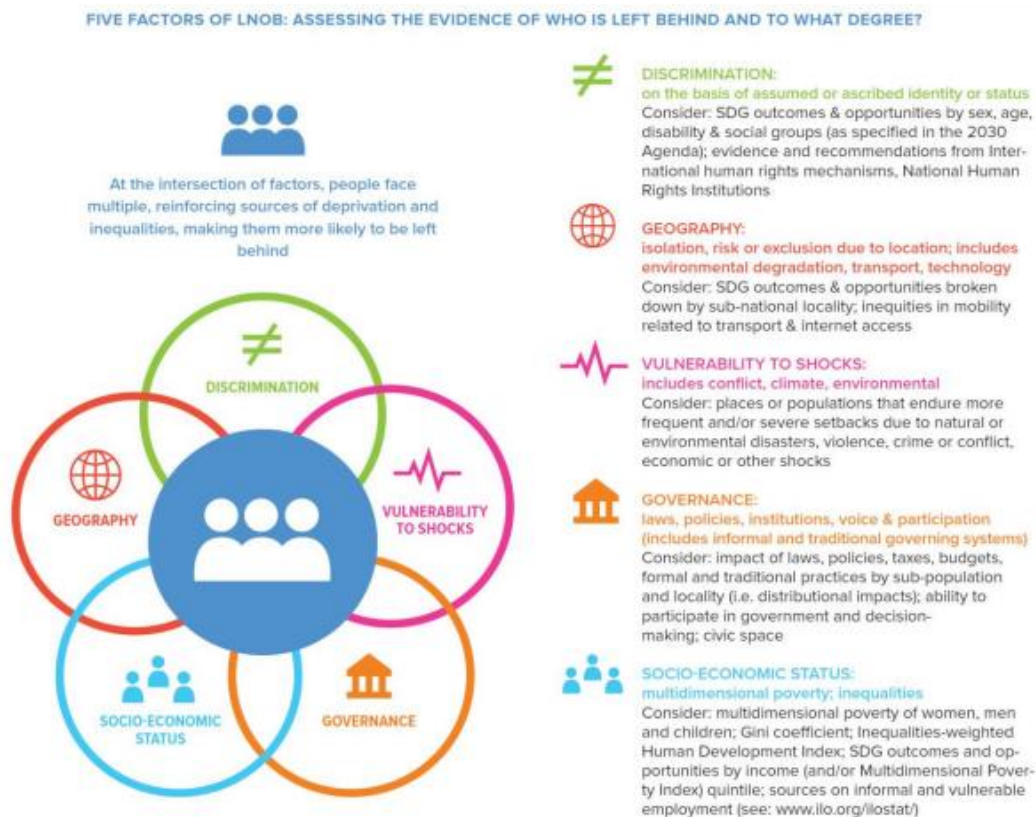
#### *Conceptual underpinnings and strategic direction*

11. UNDP has integrated LNOB principles into its corporate strategies and operations since 2018, building on earlier related work with marginalized groups and the human rights-based approach to programming. The first UNDP strategic plan (SP) to mention ‘Leaving no one behind’ is the [2018-2021 SP](#). In the ‘common chapter’ issued jointly by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN-Women, the development agencies note that “The principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first permeate all four of our strategic plans. In direct response to the QCPR, we will harness our respective collaborative advantage in compliance with our respective mandates [...]” (p.3). In what follows, UNDP associates LNOB with “universality” (para. 21) and “equality and universality” (para. 25) but doesn’t offer more detail.<sup>iv</sup>

12. UNDP’s [2022-25 strategic plan](#) elevates LNOB to one of three key objectives of the agency’s work. It describes the work of UNDP as supporting countries towards three directions of change: structural transformation, resilience and “Leaving no one behind, a rights-based approach centered on empowerment, inclusion, equity, human agency and human development capabilities which recognizes that poverty and inequality are multidimensional” (p.7).<sup>v</sup> Together with the six signature solutions and three enablers, LNOB (and the other two directions of change) is now seen as central to UNDP’s corporate identity. In combination with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions on the most vulnerable, this calls for a fresh wave of conceptual work and operational measures to which this evaluation aims to contribute.

13. At present, programmatic guidance on LNOB dates back to pre-pandemic times and the early years of the previous SP. In 2018/2019, UNDP was a lead agency in the production of the UNSDG operational guide for UN country teams, cited above. Much of UNDP’s internal thinking was mainstreamed into the guide, in particular, the “five key factors” of LNOB first introduced in the 2018 UNDP discussion paper “[What does it mean to leave no one behind?](#)”<sup>vi</sup> These are still regarded as valid today and used.

**Figure 1: Who is left behind - Five intersecting factors**



Source: UNSDG Operational Guide, 2019: p. 13. Adapted from UNDP, “[What does it mean to leave no one behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation](#)”. UNDP, New York, 2018: p. 3.

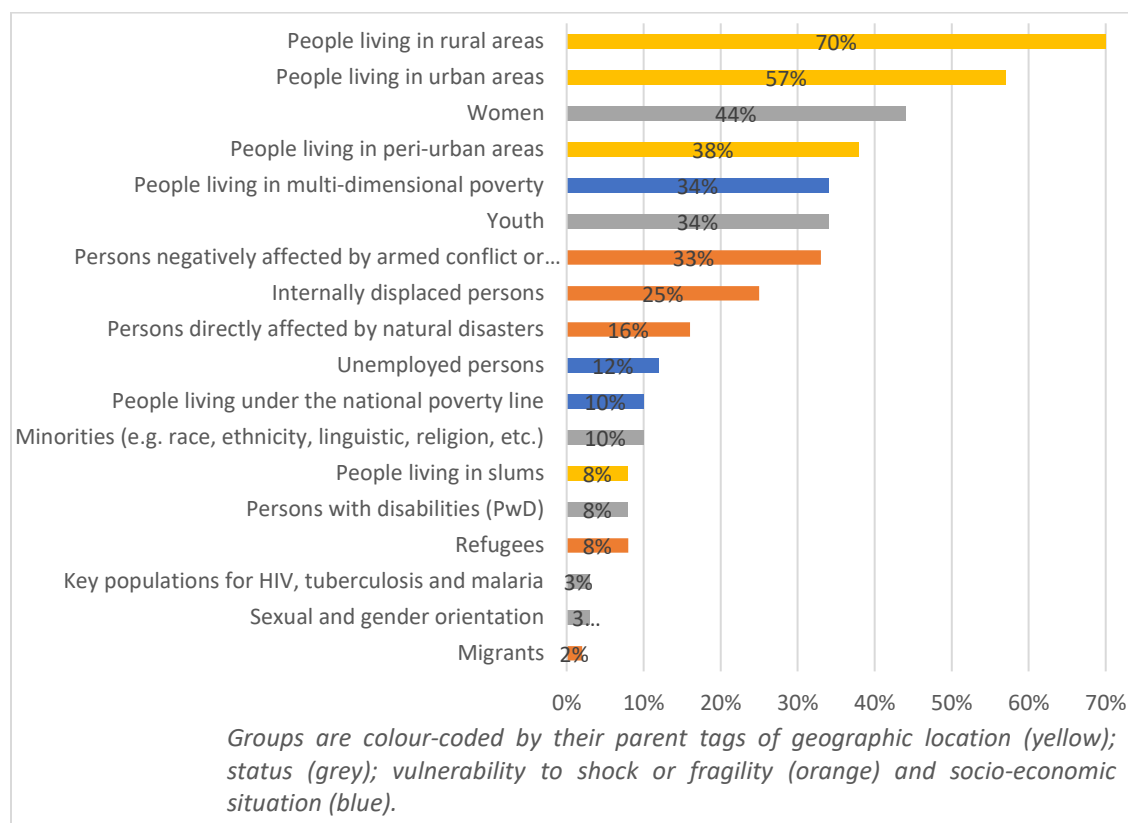
*Measurement: The LNOB Marker*

14. Since 2018, UNDP country offices are asked to report against an “LNOB marker” (also known as “Whos marker”). This is an enumerative list of 18 specific groups<sup>vii</sup> that are being targeted by UNDP interventions at the project output level. The groups are defined based on status, geographic location, socio-economic situation and vulnerability to shocks and fragility, and they are not mutually exclusive. It is important to note that many long-standing lines of UNDP intervention (working with key populations for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, etc.) are now tagged against this marker but are in no way ‘new’ or occurring in response to LNOB having become a guiding principle.

15. There are many conceptual and practical challenges associated with the LNOB marker<sup>viii</sup> but it does give an indication of the magnitude of UNDP’s interventions in favour of different groups deemed to be left behind.

16. Data for 2018–2021 shows that most projects that reported against the marker targeted specific geographic locations (people living in rural, urban and semi-urban areas), sex or age groups (women, youth) and socio-economic characteristics (people living in multi-dimensional poverty). Groups defined by other markers were relatively less targeted.

**Figure 2: ‘Leave no one behind’ groups most frequently targeted by UNDP at project output level, 2018-2021 (n=13,729).**



Source: Data from PowerBI Project-Based Portfolio Analytics, BPPS-DIG as of October 2021

Note: The data presented show project outputs linked to one or more “leave no one behind” groups. Project outputs that are not linked to any group (4,786) were not considered.

17. There are important regional variations when it comes to the LNOB groups most frequently targeted by UNDP. While certain geographical location (people living in rural; urban; and semi-urban areas) and sex/age groups (women; youth) receive attention across regions, groups defined by other criteria are targeted disproportionately in certain regions. For example, groups at higher risk to shocks and fragility (persons directly affected by natural disasters; persons negatively affected by armed conflict or violence) are being relatively more targeted in in the Africa region. So-called minority groups (e.g. racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious) are more frequently targeted in Latin America and the Caribbean.

18. In more recent years, no further conceptual or operational guidance on LNOB have been issued by UNDP. In March 2021, the IEO noted in its [Evaluation of UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-21](#) that “Overall, systemically operationalizing leave no one behind remains a significant challenge. Despite the increased effort, UNDP has yet to consistently and effectively integrate into its programmes the five factors key to understanding who is being left behind and why” (p. 38).<sup>ix</sup>

### 3. Rationale, Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

19. Boosting integration of LNOB principles is a UNDP priority, both for the sake of those left behind and to advance progress towards the SDGs. A corporate decision was taken to include a formative evaluation on the integration of ‘Leaving No One Behind’ principles in UNDP’s evaluation plan, 2022-2025, for presentation to the Executive Board in February 2023.

20. There is a triple rationale for this choice: First, the prominence of LNOB as one of three “directions of change” in UNDP’s strategic plan 2022-25, has opened questions as to its operationalization in development practice, as well as its measurement. Second, UNDP’s strategic positioning on LNOB issues and groups (e.g. long-standing work with certain marginalized groups but not others), needs to be re-examined against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. COVID has disproportionately affected those already left behind, but also newly exacerbated the marginalization of other segments of society (e.g. the “digital divide”, anti-Asian discrimination). This pattern is perpetuated in the “uneven recovery” from COVID-19 characterized by stark global inequalities in vaccine access, continuing low female labour market participation, etc. Finally, the integration of LNOB principles into UNDP’s strategies, procedures and programmes has not previously been comprehensively evaluated.

21. In this context, the purpose of the proposed evaluation is:

- To generate lessons, conclusions and recommendations that contribute to decision-making and learning with a view to improving UNDP’s ongoing and future programme design and performance, and contribution to Agenda 2030.
- To support corporate accountability on LNOB by assessing UNDP’s performance in delivering on its stated objectives to integrate the LNOB principles, and identifying contextual, strategic, and operational factors that are positively and/or negatively affecting progress.

22. Specific objectives are to:

- Reconstruct and assess the appropriateness and coherence of UNDP's corporate approach to LNOB.
- Trace UNDP's contribution to inclusive and transformative change guided by equality, non-discrimination, and equity principles, for select processes and initiatives.
- Assess UNDP's institutional capacity, including data systems, to ensure that no one is left behind.

## 4. Scope and Key Evaluation Questions

23. The evaluation seeks to assess UNDP's corporate strategies, and their application in programming and operations on the ground, in terms of integrating the LNOB principles of equality, non-discrimination and equity. Figure 3, overleaf, shows the reconstructed programme-impact pathway for LNOB integration in UNDP and visualizes the scope of the evaluation.

24. Case selection for the thematic deep-dives to complement the organizational assessment will be purposive and criterion-based, covering:

- UNDP's regions of intervention, and different development settings
- main thematic areas (signature solutions), with due consideration for intersectionality and the political dimension of LNOB within each signature solution
- LNOB areas highlighted in the UNSG's Our Common Agenda<sup>x</sup> and UNDP's "five key factors" (see figure 1, above)
- 18 key population groups highlighted in the LNOB marker (see endnote vii).

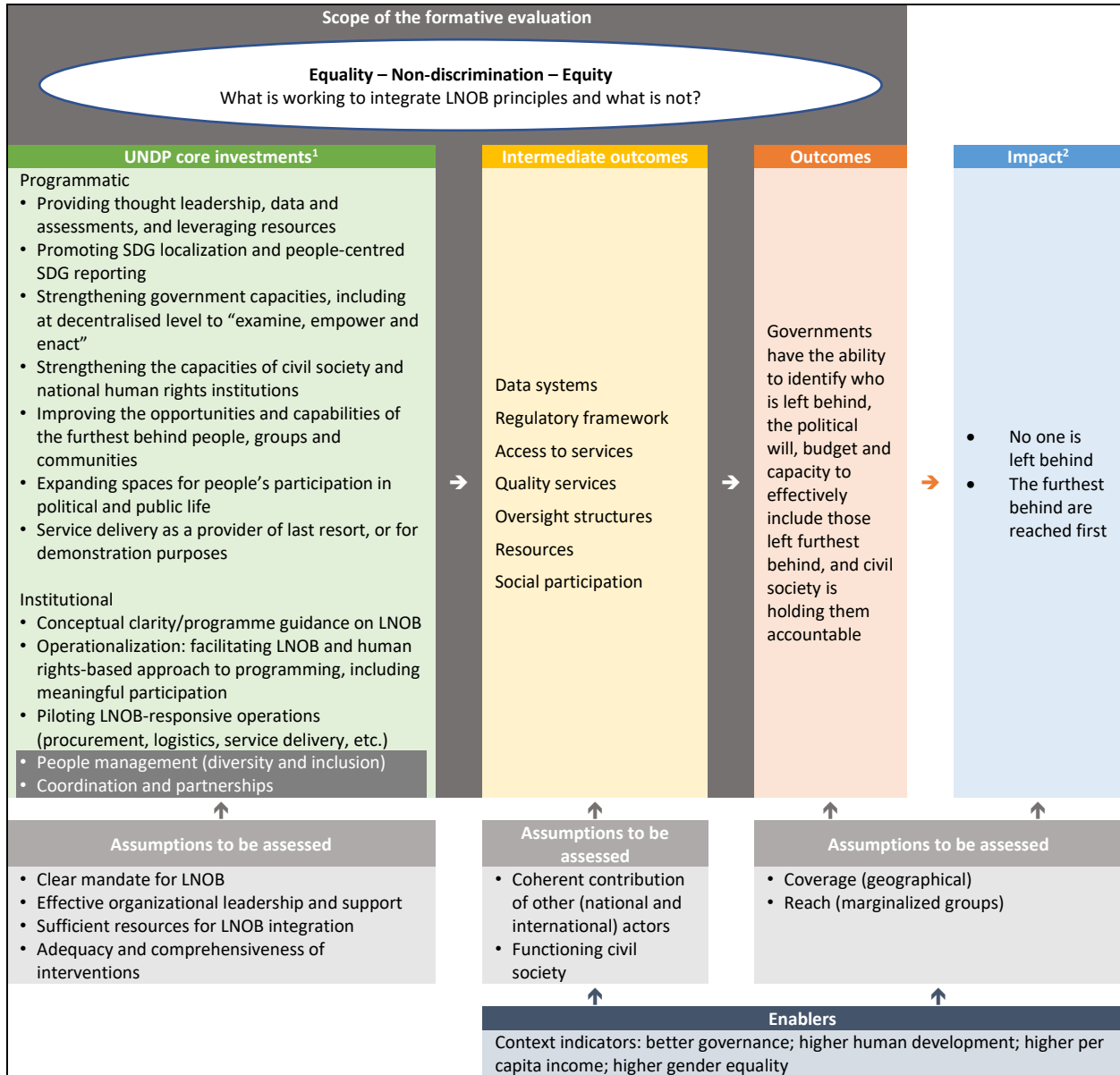
25. The scope to be covered in the evaluation is global, covering the period from 2015 onward – when the LNOB principle was endorsed by the UN General Assembly.<sup>xi</sup> For the assessment of results, greater attention will be given to the years from 2018 to the present when UNDP explicitly incorporated LNOB into its corporate strategies and country programmes.

26. The evaluation will be guided by four sets of **evaluation questions** in combination with four **evaluation criteria**, namely: coherence, efficiency, relevance and effectiveness. The principal evaluation questions are:

1. COHERENCE: How coherent are UNDP strategies, procedures, and guidance with regard to integrating the LNOB principle?
2. EFFICIENCY: Has UNDP made the best use of scarce resources (human/financial/social capital) to expeditiously integrate the LNOB principle as committed?
3. RELEVANCE: Have UNDP initiatives been able to adapt to the needs and priorities of those left furthest behind?
4. EFFECTIVENESS: To what extent has UNDP contributed to results that benefitted those left furthest behind? What were the major factors contributing to or hindering achievement of LNOB objectives?



**Figure 3: Draft conceptual framework for assessing what UNDP is learning from its attempt to integrate the LNOB principles**



1: Source: “What does it mean to leave no one behind”, pages 23, 25, 27. UNDP PowerBI Project-Based Portfolio Analytics, BPPS-DIG as of October 2021.

2: UN Resolution “[Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)”



## 5. Evaluation Methodology

27. The evaluation is mainly formative, i.e. orientated towards learning and occurring while LNOB integration is being designed or ongoing. It will also include summative elements, both in the organizational assessment and through thematic deep-dives. The evaluation will utilize mixed methods and draw on quantitative and qualitative sources for data collection and analysis. It will aspire to take the perspective of those left furthest behind and adhere to the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#).<sup>xii</sup>

28. The main analytical prism for the formative portion will be qualitative content analysis, or textual analysis (of quantitative and qualitative sources), and discourse analysis (power analysis).<sup>xiii</sup> The summative portion will take a generative (or mechanism-based) approach to causality through process tracing<sup>xiv</sup> in thematic deep-dives. Process Tracing is a theory-based evaluation method that highlights the importance of causal mechanisms and context in relation to outcomes. Its power unfolds when tracing complex policy impacts or large-scale interventions. Process Tracing offers rigorous assessments for topics too complex to adequately capture by quasi-experimental designs.

29. To identify patterns and gaps, and factors that foster/hinder appropriateness and contribution, the evaluation will combine three lines of inquiry (data collection):

1. An organizational assessment will look at conceptual clarity around LNOB in UNDP; operationalization of the concept in guidance, processes and tools, including tools for programme and project development; resources (human and financial) invested in the area; and the ability to capture results through M&E systems for all six of UNDP's signature solutions. Main sources will include queries to corporate systems and programmatic markers (LNOB marker, etc.), key informant interviews, document review, 'web scraping' of internal social media and a SparkBlue consultation.
2. Select thematic deep-dives will shed light on how LNOB principles have been applied in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting. Process tracing will bring to the fore what results have been achieved for those left behind and whether the furthest behind have been reached first. Each study will include key informant interviews/focus groups, document review and site observations (if possible under continuing COVID-19 conditions).
3. A stakeholder survey and study of comparator organizations will provide the gaze 'from the outside in' on how well UNDP integrates LNOB principles. The stakeholder survey will be administered to a sample of UNDP's partners (government, civil society, private sector umbrella organizations), both those who implement programmes with directly with UNDP and those who don't. Surveys may be supplemented by interviews as needed. The study of comparator organizations, to be carried out by a Think Tank aims at benchmarking UNDP against the industry standard and at bringing new learning into the organization based on good practices observed elsewhere.

## 6. Management and Conduct of the Evaluation

30. The evaluation will be led by a team of IEO evaluators with the support of external consultants. UNDP is looking for individuals with deep commitment and strong background in evaluation, rights-based approaches and relevant subject matter to contribute to the evaluation which has major implications for the agency's future work. Given the focus on organizational learning, the evaluation will aim for consultation and interaction with internal and external stakeholders at key moments of the process.

31. The evaluation will be supported by an evaluation learning group (ELG), composed of up to eight LNOB champions from within UNDP. The purpose of the ELG is to foster mutual learning between the evaluation team and LNOB champions: On the one hand, deliberations by the group will foster evaluative reasoning and promote learning from this evaluation to stay within the organization. On the other hand, the insights shared by LNOB champions will help ground the evaluation in organizational realities and ensure that it zooms in on aspects most in need of learning and forward-looking recommendations. The group thus will strengthen the utility of this formative evaluation, both by contributing to its pertinence and by enhancing organizational ownership of the exercise, with expected benefits for implementation of management response actions. Key moments of ELG engagement are highlighted in red in the evaluation timeline in Annex 1.

32. Further, the evaluation will benefit from the insights of up to three external experts as well as different fora representing left behind populations themselves. Engagement with these groups is expected to strengthen the credibility and utility of this formative evaluation.

### **Key Challenges Anticipated**

33. The main challenges the evaluation will seek to mitigate throughout the process are:

- Compressed timeframe: To mitigate, the evaluation will tackle a manageable scope, in particular through assessing contribution via an organizational assessment and select thematic deep-dives.
- COVID-19 and remote work (limited travel): The evaluation will apply lessons learned by the IEO over the past 20 months of remote work. It is considering hiring local data collectors in focus countries. Sampling and logistical questions will be addressed during the inception phase.
- Data scarcity and low evaluability, both in principle (absence of clear conceptual framework) and in practice (data requirements not fulfilled, especially with regard to disaggregation, quality and coverage): The evaluation will re-construct programme-impact pathways for all UNDP signature solutions and the select deep-dives, based on stakeholder input and available documentation, to overcome low evaluability in principle. These may be used as starting points for learning and/or constructing theories of change by UNDP's programme teams. Low evaluability in practice, if confirmed, would likely be a limitation of the evaluation and the object of evaluation findings and conclusions themselves. It may also warrant a recommendation, thus constituting an area of improvement for UNDP's work.

## Annex 1: Tentative timeline

Activity	Proposed timeframe
<b>Phase 1: Launch and inception</b>	<b>Dec 2021/Jan 2022</b>
Draft TOR approved for stakeholder review	Dec 2021
ELG consultation on ToR; finalization and IEO approval of ToR (“evaluation launch”)	Dec 2021
Team composition, external recruitments	Dec 2021/Jan 2022
ELG meeting on conceptual framework	Late Jan 2022
Ethical review of evaluation methodology	Jan/Feb 2022
<b>Phase 2: Data collection</b>	<b>Late Jan-March 2022</b>
Main data collection phase	Feb-Mid-March 2021
Team stocktake and moment of reflection; followed by management debrief	Mid-March 2022
ELG email to facilitate filling data gaps	Mid-March 2022
<b>Phase 3: Analysis and drafting</b>	<b>April-June 2022</b>
Initial data analysis and filling data gaps (iterative process)	March/April 2021
Submission of deep-dive reports and draft organizational assessment paper	March/April 2022
Synthesis and report writing	April-Early June 2022
ELG debrief (PPT) on preliminary findings, and areas for conclusions and recommendations	Mid-June 2022
Zero draft for review by section chief and directorate	End June 2022
<b>Phase 4: Quality review, revisions and report finalization</b>	<b>July-Sept 2022</b>
Revised draft for section chief clearance for internal peer review	2 <sup>nd</sup> week of July 2022
Internal peer review	3 <sup>rd</sup> week of July 2022
First draft for directorate clearance for external peer review	4 <sup>th</sup> week of July 2022
Revised first draft for directorate clearance to share with management (cc ELG) for their comments	Mid-August 2022
Board paper preparation	Sept 2022
Board paper/Second draft for directorate clearance to share with management (cc ELG) as basis for MR	End September
<b>Phase 5: Publication and dissemination</b>	<b>Oct 2022-March 2023</b>
Management response drafted	Oct 2022
Editing and formatting of eval report and MR	Oct/Nov 2022
Final edited report, evaluation brief and video	Nov 2022
Board informal	Jan 2023
Executive Board session	Feb 2023
Knowledge exchange through blog posts, conference participation, Op-Eds, etc.	Immediately following Board session
Management response implementation workshop	Feb or March 2023

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<sup>i</sup> United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1 General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, Sustainable Development Goals, Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development, A Shared United Nations System Framework for Action, New York, 2017.

<sup>iii</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), Leaving No One Behind, A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams, Interim Draft, 18 March 2019. The five-step approach has these core areas for action: 1. Determine who is being left behind; 2. Determine why they are being left behind; 3. Explore what should be done; 4. Measure and monitor progress; 5. Advance and increase accountability.

<sup>iv</sup> UNDP Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, Special Session 2017, UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, DP/2017/38, 17 October 2017.

<sup>v</sup> United Nations Development Programme Strategic Plan 2022-2025, UNDP 2021.

<sup>vi</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind?”, A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation, July 2018.

<sup>vii</sup> The 18 groups identified by UNDP are: Internally displaced persons; Key populations for HIV, tuberculosis & malaria; Migrants; Minorities; People living in multi-dimensional poverty; People living in peri-urban areas; People living in rural areas; People living in slums; People living in urban areas; People living under national poverty line; Persons directly affected by natural disasters; Persons negatively affected by armed conflict/violence; Persons with disabilities; Refugees; Sexual & gender orientation; Unemployed; Women; Youth.

<sup>viii</sup> Conceptual challenges centre around the relationship between targeting and UNDP’s ambition for universalism, the notion of ‘intersectionality’, the choice to break out certain groups (e.g. youth) but not others (e.g. elderly), the use of certain labels (“minorities [race/linguistic/religion]”) rather than others (“indigenous peoples”) and language use more generally. Practical challenges include: uptake of the marker by country offices, limited guidance on the use of the marker, the fact that each project output can report targeting only up to five of these groups, lack of clarity on indicating overlaps (which would signify an intersectional position of a particular population), difficulties linking financial and results reporting to the LNOB groups – which is a wider problem in UNDP beyond the LNOB marker.

<sup>ix</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Independent Evaluation Office, Evaluation of UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, March 2021.

<sup>x</sup> United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, Our Common Agenda, Key Proposals Across the 12 commitments from the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.

<sup>xi</sup> United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1 General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

<sup>xii</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation, 2020.

<sup>xiii</sup> Textual analysis (or qualitative content analysis) is a catch-all term for various research methods used to describe, interpret and understand texts. The focus is on exploring, describing, ordering, explaining and displaying patterns. See Miles, M., Huberman, M., and Saldana, J., *Qualitative Data Analysis - A Methods Sourcebook*, SAGE Publications 2019. Discourse analysis (or critical discourse analysis) in contrast “accounts for the relationships between discourse and social power. More specifically, such an analysis should describe and explain how power ... is enacted, reproduced or legitimised by the text and talk of dominant groups or institutions”. See Van Dijk, T., “Discourse, power and access” in *Texts and Practices*, Routledge 1995. It is a constructivist approach focusing on social context and power relations, similar to gender analysis, empowerment evaluation, and other critical methods used in international development.

<sup>xiv</sup> Collier, David, University of California Berkeley, ‘Understanding Process Tracing’, *Political Science & Politics* 44.4: 823–30, 2011 For a quick overview of application in evaluations see the Process Tracing entry in INTRAC’s M&E universe.