Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF THE INTEGRATION BY UNDP OF THE PRINCIPLES OF "LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND"

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FOREWORD

The commitment to 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) is a central transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and one of three organizational 'directions of change' for UNDP. This formative evaluation report sets out the extent to which the LNOB principles of equality, equity and non-discrimination permeate key areas of UNDP programmes and operations, and puts forward recommendations for deepening the integration of these principles.

The world is vastly unequal, with extreme wealth and opportunity coexisting alongside extreme poverty, marginalization and adversity. The poorest half of the world's population owns a negligible share of global wealth, while the richest 10 percent own 76 percent of all wealth. Threats such as climate change, conflict and a global pandemic aggravate the overlapping effects of discrimination according to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability that already harm, exclude and disadvantage some populations.

It is now recognized that national averages constitute poor evidence for policy decisions, as they conceal disparities affecting the individuals and groups who are furthest behind. The LNOB agenda seeks to redress this failure by making progress for these populations central to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Leave No One Behind, and its twin promise to 'Reach the Furthest Behind First' (RFBF), means prioritizing human dignity and ensuring the progress of the most marginalized communities first. It urges nations to address the structural causes of inequality and ensure realization of rights and access to services in areas where quick results are least likely and visibility is lowest. The ambitious undertaking of operationalizing the LNOB concept requires a collective effort to identify and share effective strategies.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation assessed key aspects of LNOB integration in UNDP programmes and institutional effectiveness at global, regional and country levels, covering the period 2018 to mid-2022. It was conducted while practical measures to integrate LNOB into UNDP programmes and operations were being actively implemented, and therefore a formative, organizational learning focus was timely. The present report is the fruit of an independent, impartial and collaborative process involving many stakeholders at different levels of the organization and beyond. It represents a collective reflection about what UNDP has learned and where it is headed as an organization with regard to integrating LNOB and RFBF into its programmes and operations.

The evaluation provides UNDP with specific recommendations as it implements its Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, which has elevated LNOB to one of the agency's key organizational objectives. Recommendations include the adoption of an organization-wide 'equality+' promise, with a stronger commitment to non-discrimination, and strengthening the organization's architecture for combatting poverty and inequality with greater resources and a stronger mandate to lead organizational efforts to integrate LNOB principles. The equality+ promise should include a clear implementation glide path to operationalize the organization's commitment, the curation and dissemination of programmatic solutions for different development settings to country-level staff, and engaging more strongly with non-governmental actors as partners.

As we reach the halfway point to 2030, this is an opportune moment to review UNDP achievements, identify what has worked well and where the challenges remain, and to use this learning to inform actions on equality, equity and non-discrimination. I hope this evaluation will encourage UNDP to further sharpen its tools for integrating an LNOB and RFBF lens, to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDA	Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics
BPPS	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CAR	Central African Republic
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	Country office
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GES	Gender Equality Strategy
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GPN	Global Policy Network
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
HQ	Headquarters
ICCA	Indigenous Community Conservation Area
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRRF	Integrated Results and Resources Framework
LDC	Least Developed Country
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOPAN	Multilateral Organizational Performance Assessment Network
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PwD	Persons with Disabilities

RBM	Results-Based Management
RFBF	Reach the Furthest Behind First
ROAR	Results-Oriented Annual Report
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGP	Small Grants Programme
SP	Strategic Plan
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UN SWAP	United Nations System-Wide Action Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a formative evaluation of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) strategies and performance in integrating 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) and 'Reach the Furthest Behind First' (RFBF) principles into its programmes and operations. The evaluation is the first comprehensive attempt to gather and analyse evidence on how an equality, equity and non-discrimination focus has been applied across UNDP.

Context

Recent years have seen deep and interlocking crises that are growing in scale and severity. Armed conflict is causing distress for millions of people and has amplified the effects of the climate crisis and associated cost-of-living and food crises. The persisting coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a devastating impact and, with less than 20 percent of people in low-income countries vaccinated, recovery is uneven. Longstanding inequalities around the world are worsening, having regressed close to early 20th Century levels. In nearly all countries, to varying degrees, age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, migration status, socioeconomic status, place of residence, and sexual orientation and gender identity have been grounds for social exclusion. These dimensions of discrimination overlap and intersect to harm and disadvantage some populations vis-à-vis others, and are exacerbated when additional crises hit.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a plan of action integrating three dimensions of sustainability – social, economic and environmental. It sets a new standard in development and shared responsibility, one that promises to 'Leave No One Behind'. This pledge represents the political commitment of all United Nations Member States to eradicate poverty, discrimination and exclusion, and to reduce the inequalities that undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole. Reaching the Furthest Behind First, the second part of the LNOB pledge, obliges state actors not only to make the invisible visible and support the hard-to-reach, but to make this a priority. Leaving no one behind comes with new challenges, and the practical implications often remain unclear to development practitioners, with a tendency to deploy the rhetoric of LNOB while continuing to implement traditional development strategies.

To institutionalize LNOB/RFBF, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination devised a 'whole-of-system' Shared Framework for Action,[1] mandating United Nations entities to focus on three interrelated elements: equality, non-discrimination and equity. The UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (SP) subsequently elevated LNOB to one of three organizational 'directions of change'. While LNOB terminology is characteristic of the post-2015 era, in practice UNDP has been pursuing LNOB-related development pathways since the 1990s. The UNDP approach to LNOB integration can be characterized as: informed by the human development concept,[2] emphasizing human agency; promoting context-specific

[1] United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, '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.

[2] Human development is defined as the process of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities and improving their well-being.

approaches, starting from an analysis of who is left behind; and moving towards an intersectional understanding of different factors[3] that combine to leave people behind, requiring an integrated programmatic response.

The evaluation assessed key aspects of UNDP programmes and institutional effectiveness at global, regional and country level, covering the period 2018 to mid-2022, with some attention to earlier strategic decisions and actions for background and contextualization. The evaluation was primarily formative and focused on organizational learning. It was guided by four evaluation questions aligned to the following criteria:

- **COHERENCE:** How coherent are UNDP strategies, procedures and guidance with regard to integrating the LNOB principle, including RFBF?
- **EFFICIENCY:** Has UNDP made the best use of scarce resources (human/financial/social capital) to expeditiously integrate the LNOB principle as committed, including RFBF?
- **RELEVANCE:** Have UNDP initiatives been able to adapt to the needs and priorities of those left furthest behind?
- **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?

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, drawing on quantitative and qualitative sources for data collection and analysis. It combined five lines of inquiry:

- An **institutional assessment** reviewed conceptual clarity of LNOB and RFBF in UNDP; operationalization through guidance, processes and tools; resources (human and financial) invested; and corporate ability to capture and credibly report results based on evidence.
- A **programmatic assessment** reviewed UNDP strategic positioning, lessons based on past performance and emerging opportunities for contributions to results, by each of the six UNDP Signature Solutions.
- Two **deep-dives** were conceived as an exploration of the 'political dimension' of the agency's LNOB work, testing two overarching claims, on evidence-based policy advisory and coalition-building, using process tracing methodology.
- A **study of comparator organizations** provided a comparative benchmarking and lessons for consideration by UNDP.
- A **civil society organization survey** gathered more ample external views on the relevance and effectiveness of UNDP work from those representing and in close contact with the most left-behind populations.

[3] UNDP, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation', UNDP, New York, 2018.

To assess LNOB integration at country level, a purposive sample of 15 countries was drawn, prioritizing countries with a high potential for lesson learning, and considering regional spread, variety in development settings, and diversity of LNOB issues and initiatives. The evaluation findings were informed by the views and insights of nearly 1,000 persons. Ethical approval for the evaluation methodology was granted by an external ethical review board. The evaluation used the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) system to determine, based on past evaluations, to what extent UNDP achieved results in support of various 'LNOB groups'.[4] In addition, the evaluation used a mix of standard data analysis methods, such as theory-based analysis of actual versus intended results and influencing/hindering factors, including from a gender and disability perspective as required by United Nations system-wide action plans.[5]

Findings and Conclusions

UNDP Strategic Positioning - Given the organization's early adoption of the LNOB agenda as well as its broad country presence, convener role and growing innovation and digital work, the organization is well positioned to help bring clarity, leadership and practical approaches on better integrating LNOB principles into programmes and operations. While an emphasis on equity and equality has been intrinsic to UNDP, there is less focus on non-discrimination. For political and cultural reasons, UNDP usually followed a cautious approach; efforts to facilitate open civic dialogue around power relations and social norms were found to be limited in many contexts.

Understanding of heterogeneity within targeted populations, and of intersectionality,[6] remains limited in UNDP but is increasingly gaining traction, especially in work with persons with disabilities, women and youth. While the organization's capacity to bring diverse stakeholders together is widely recognized, this has not been fully leveraged to systematically engage non-governmental actors as partners on LNOB and RFBF. UNDP mostly relies on civil society for service delivery and on the private sector as donors; it engages them less in monitoring of public policy implementation and in hyperlocal, longer-term and more participatory partnerships.

UNDP Institutional Effectiveness - While recent strategic plans strongly noted UNDP commitment to LNOB, organizational strategies, guidance and tools have varied in their attention and in conceptual clarity. Focus on reaching the furthest behind first is particularly limited in programme implementation. Criteria for prioritization of specific populations have been unclear and the intersectional approach inconsistently applied due to limited guidance, lack of data and unwelcoming political environments. Having LNOB communicated as everyone's responsibility has diluted accountability and limited coordination and incentives for LNOB. Mobilizing and adequately allocating financial and human resources for LNOB integration is a challenge, especially because of the donor- and government-driven, projectized nature of UNDP work.

UNDP has taken steps towards promoting diversity, equality and inclusion in staffing. Despite progress, the degree of commitment varies at different levels across the organization and resource allocation does not yet match to the commitment expressed in discourse. UNDP corporate planning, budgeting

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4 The 18 'LNOB groups' targeted by UNDP are enumerated in Table 1 of the main report.

5 The United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN SWAP) (United Nations (UN) system-wide Action Plans) are UN system-wide accountability frameworks for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and the rights of people with disabilities.

6 Intersectionality refers to the experience of overlapping, simultaneous systems of oppression.

and monitoring systems have moved towards a greater degree of disaggregation of data by target population, which benefits an LNOB approach. However, there has been limited movement away from reporting for compliance with pre-determined results, and limited learning from integrated systems-thinking approaches. In addition, UNDP systems make it difficult to credibly assess the resources dedicated to LNOB integration.

UNDP Programme Performance - The agency's commitment to LNOB has been evident in contributions for improving inequality data and analytics among national counterparts to determine who is left behind. Given the scale and interconnectedness of poverty and inequality issues globally, UNDP is increasingly focusing on more strategic and innovative paths to LNOB and RFBF integration and is contributing to results on integrated sustainable development finance, addressing informality and promoting social protection to enhance the lives of the furthest behind. Upstream approaches to strengthening the capacities of national and local governance institutions, policy dialogue and promoting integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have generated relevant UNDP contributions to populations most likely to be left behind. Results for the furthest behind were also achieved in the areas of rule of law and health provision, with more mixed outcomes for downstream interventions on political participation.

Conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction programming have been successful in reaching some left-behind target populations, but volatile settings pose additional challenges to effectively identify, access and support the most disadvantaged. Climate adaptation programming has strengthened government capacities to address the needs of those likely to be left behind, but results were hindered by siloed approaches. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme has excelled at documenting success stories in reaching women, youth and indigenous peoples and local communities in particular. The UNDP energy 'moonshot' and contributions to enhanced energy access for rural populations, women, the elderly and the poorest of the poor are serving as a key avenue for reaching the furthest behind first.

There have been relevant contributions aimed at preventing and responding to gender-based violence, and to fighting structural barriers to women's empowerment. Intersectional approaches are emerging, but were not found to be systematic across countries and workstreams. To better integrate LNOB, UNDP would benefit from the lessons learned from its effort to mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women in the organization. Roll-out of the 'Gender Seal' and increased resource allocation, although still inadequate, have been major enablers affecting integration of LNOB.

Based on these findings, the evaluation draws the following conclusions:

Some key pre-conditions for the good integration of LNOB are met by UNDP, with particular attention devoted to the promotion of equality and equity. Focus on non-discrimination is more limited.

There were several periods of heightened momentum that UNDP leveraged for the integration of LNOB. There is now some level of common understanding of LNOB, staff are motivated, and informal support mechanisms are in place. Despite these enablers, the organization has yet to sufficiently institutionalize LNOB, including through the allocation of adequate resources and the creation of lasting accountability structures and capacities. A coordinated operational approach – including dedicated staff and knowledge-sharing mechanisms, regular tone-setting messaging from senior managers, adequate resources, incentives and responsibility frameworks – is still lacking. This is preventing deeper integration of LNOB and achievement of more visible results.

UNDP made important contributions to conceptual clarity on LNOB, notably through linking LNOB to inequality and intersectional pathways. Focus on reaching the furthest behind first has been more limited, despite this being a key part of the LNOB pledge.

The organization's conceptual work ('five-factor framework')[7] adds clarity to LNOB principles and has been emulated by others. Through its conceptual and empirical work on multidimensional poverty, UNDP is linking LNOB to the broader debate around inequality – a useful addition to the human rights-based focus championed by United Nations agencies. While the UNDP take on LNOB is coherent with the expectations of the 2030 Agenda and aligned to its human development approach, the added value of the organization has not yet been clearly communicated. Internally, the five-factor framework has not yet trickled down to staff at the country level and is rarely used. While UNDP staff strongly identify with the RFBF vision, and it is in line with the organization's mandate, it does not figure in the current strategic plan or other key documents and initiatives. At Signature Solution-level, references to LNOB are mostly rhetorical. A group-by-group approach prevails, without proper attention to operationalizing an intersectional lens.

UNDP programme performance in terms of making a difference to the lives of left-behind populations varied greatly, with best results found in long-standing areas of engagement that predate the SDGs and LNOB. Initiatives did not usually put the furthest behind first.

While often making a difference to people's lives in the short term, most initiatives did not necessarily live up to the promise to put the furthest behind first and effects have been of uncertain durability. In most settings, 'leaving no one behind' was merely used rhetorically as a communication and advocacy tool, without noticeable programmatic implications or results. Over the period examined, no step-change was visible in how UNDP targeted or interacted with left-behind populations. There was variation between country operations, largely dependent on leadership styles – with some indication of potential culture change towards more adaptive and participatory styles of management, and greater attention to human rights concerns.

Clarity of intent, leadership support and strong government and civil society engagement were key factors contributing to more successful integration of LNOB principles into UNDP programmatic work.

Effective LNOB integration took place where UNDP was intentional about reaching the most left-behind sub-groups within targeted populations and about key intersections; where messaging was clear, accountability ensured and resources provided; where leadership was supportive, both internally and at national government level; and where partnerships with civil society were strong enough, including influence at the local level, to reach even the most marginalized. Where government took ownership and accountability of initiatives to 'examine' or 'enact' LNOB principles, this has accelerated results achievement. Where government did not recognize the existence of certain populations likely to be left behind (e.g., ethnic minorities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex [LGBTQI+], etc.), UNDP has been conservative in speaking out against discrimination and sometimes self-censored the scope of its interventions.

[7] See UNDP, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind?', p.3. See also Figure 1 in this report.

The key factors hindering LNOB integration were limited guidance and capacity to operationalize the principles, bias in strategic planning and project implementation, and a fragmented, group-by-group and projectized approach to programming.

The fragmented nature of support provided by UNDP in-country, compartmentalizing populations into 'LNOB groups', hampered integration and addressing intersectional linkages. Incomplete management for development results and static systems limited UNDP capacity to demonstrate results for the furthest behind. The link between identifying furthest-behind populations and effectively targeting them in programming was not automatic. There was some evidence of bias in beneficiary selection and a preference for working with elites, further excluding marginalized individuals and groups.

Recommendations

Broaden the UNDP approach to leaving no one behind: UNDP should systematically adopt an "equality+" promise, including a stronger commitment to non-discrimination initiatives, and strengthen the architecture of its Signature Solution 1 to lead programmatic integration of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first.

Given the organization's niche in poverty eradication and inequality reduction – conceptually, in terms of metrics and in programming – UNDP should drive LNOB and RFBF integration through its work on inequality, multidimensional poverty and sustainable integrated finance. This will help elevate LNOB and RFBF beyond group-based approaches in favour of a greater focus on intersectionality, when appropriate, and in favour of an explicit focus on equity and non-discrimination (the "+" in "equality+"). The "equality+" approach aligns with corporate 'moonshots' and priorities to help UNDP strengthen its thought leadership and strategic position in poverty eradication with an enhanced systemic approach to serve the poorest of the poor and reach the furthest behind first

The "equality+" promise should include organization-wide efforts, with Signature Solution 1 (poverty and inequality) as its institutional anchor. It is now time for UNDP to wholeheartedly endorse this choice and create an appropriate support structure for it. At country level, the promise of "equality+" should include expertise and a systematic emphasis on engagement with left-behind groups in all their diversity, which is both an ethical mandate in the 2030 Agenda and a key factor in successful integrative interventions. Further, an accountability mechanism (e.g., 'friends' or 'champions of LNOB' at the UNDP Executive Board), consistent messaging by senior management and cross-functional collaboration (in particular with the SDG integration team and Accelerator Labs) need to accompany the integration process.

Turn commitment to reach the furthest behind first into action: UNDP should devise a clear implementation glide path operationalizing its commitment to supporting those furthest behind first.

Reaching the furthest behind first, the second half of the LNOB pledge made by the General Assembly, has received inadequate attention in UNDP, despite staff commitment. There is an opportunity for the organization to demonstrate leadership in the United Nations system in this regard, given the agency's operational strength, local presence and mandate to serve the poorest of the poor. Within the United Nations Country Team division of labour, UNDP should adopt an intentional focus on those furthest-behind populations that do not fall within the mandates of other agencies (and are perhaps less visible), such as the elderly and people with disabilities, in keeping with the UNDP focus on intersectionality.

Internally, UNDP should clarify financial requirements so as to appropriately budget and seek funding for an RFBF refocus, and assign responsibilities at the senior management level. An implementation glide path should clarify corporate responsibilities for promoting RFBF and the provision of adequate technical support – including for advocacy efforts at United Nations system-wide, regional and country levels to avoid diluting accountability. The expectation is that following the glide path will enable UNDP to lead on RFBF and play a strategic integrator role on LNOB.

Implement programming that responds to the need for leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first: UNDP should curate and disseminate development solutions for the integration of both concepts for country-level staff and for different development settings through a resourced learning hub.

Building on the organization's knowledge strategy and consultative processes, a resourced learning hub could be created to systematically share knowledge, lessons learned and success stories in relation to LNOB and RFBF programming and to develop and share tools and guidance to deal with constraints. To ensure uptake and evolution of the LNOB and RFBF learning hub, staff time should be dedicated for learning and skills development, including of partners. The learning hub could contain a 'LNOB and RFBF toolbox' in the shape of a resource website or other living document, publishing top lessons every so often. The toolbox could be curated to promote a context-specific approach and South-South learning, featuring interventions that exemplify proactive RFBF-focused designs with clear outcome-focused results capture mechanisms. Tools could provide separate information for each major development setting (upper-middle-income countries, lower-middle-income countries, least developed countries, fragile states, at a minimum), and demonstrate use of the examine-empower-enact framework. The toolbox will need to be practical and user-friendly, and tested with users during its development.

Engage non-governmental actors as partners: UNDP should strengthen its engagement with civil society organizations and private sector partners and build their capacity to advance the agenda for leaving no one behind. This should go beyond project-based, contractual and funding relationships and move towards a partnership model, which is particularly important to reaching the furthest behind.

To enhance its chances of truly reaching the furthest behind first or those most likely to be left behind, UNDP should work with non-governmental actors in diverse dimensions, such as service delivery to those not otherwise reached, motivating civic engagement, defending and advocating for citizens' rights and for upholding or changing social norms, and civil monitoring to hold government accountable. In particular, UNDP should further support capacity development and empowerment of civil society, with particular focus on LNOB and RFBF, including at the local and community levels, avoiding elite capture and lopsided approaches that instrumentalize civil society organizations as mere project implementers. Together with left-behind populations, UNDP and partners can better capitalize on non-government actors as active agents in their communities' transformative changes and development.

Deliberately fund programmatic integration of leaving no one behind: When allocating regular resources and negotiating cost sharing, UNDP should strategically consider reaching the furthest behind principles and country scores on the corresponding corporate marker. Resource mobilization strategies should specifically clarify the UNDP value proposition for reaching the furthest behind first and the cost of inaction.

A budget line for LNOB and RFBF integration and related monitoring and evaluation should be systematically included in large-scale donor agreements, pooled funding and funding windows, as appropriate. Particularly for pooled resources and funding windows, where UNDP is a fund manager, it should build a stronger LNOB lens in the application process, asking candidates to clarify how those left

behind are targeted and structural issues addressed. This model should be promoted and followed by other United Nations pooled funding mechanisms. In allocating core resources, UNDP should advance its discussion with the Executive Board to reform the allocation formula for core resources to go beyond gross domestic product and consider country-level inequality indicators. To support advocacy and resource mobilization on RFBF, UNDP should commission and broadly disseminate research on the importance of RFBF and the costs of inaction (the cost of not reaching the furthest behind, for society and the planet), systematically engaging during this research with populations left furthest behind. This should be accompanied by a business case on social return on investment for RFBF. Results should be communicated to donors along with clarity on the UNDP value proposition, supported by evidence of past performance.

Update metrics and learning for leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first: UNDP should invest in more holistic corporate-level metrics and learning for LNOB and RFBF that highlight the perspectives of those furthest behind, demonstrate a systems-thinking approach and strategically consider intersectionality.

UNDP should explore how to better use its corporate planning, monitoring and evaluation systems around measuring impact – in particular, to track the change UNDP programmes achieve in the lives of people, especially those left behind, for enlarged freedoms and opportunities, and improved well-being. This would require UNDP systems to put additional attention to LNOB and RFBF (considering intersectionality, when appropriate) to allow capturing lived experiences and facilitate resource mobilization. As UNDP continues to refine its integrated resources and results framework, it should focus greater attention to LNOB and RFBF. UNDP should also ensure improved attention to lesson-learning on LNOB integration by embedding LNOB and RFBF in its new knowledge strategy, which also deserves improved attention to track impact-level lessons. As part of this corporate results framework and systems overhaul, the LNOB marker should be revised and improved, aligning it more closely with the five-factor framework, reflecting greater complexity of identities and building on lessons learned from the gender marker.

Key Lessons

The following key lessons were derived mostly from the comparator organizations study commissioned as part of this evaluation and from 35 years of gender mainstreaming efforts in UNDP.

1. Comparator organizations with different mandates and scopes of work went through internal consultative processes to define how to best to integrate LNOB principles.
2. There is no 'one size fits all' for translating organizational commitments into effective programming for LNOB.
3. Simply elevating LNOB in strategic documents will not necessarily lead to the organizational focus and resources required.
4. A group-by-group approach alone is neither practical nor efficient, as it creates overlapping accountabilities, is open-ended (ever-more groups can be added) and neglects intersectionalities.
5. A change in mindset requires staff diversity, leaders and a common understanding of why LNOB and RFBF are central.
6. Obtaining and using data are critical for identifying those left behind and for relevance and effectiveness of interventions.

Chapter 1.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a formative evaluation of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) strategies and performance in integrating 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) and 'Reaching the Furthest Behind First' (RFBF) principles into its programmes and operations. This evaluation is the first comprehensive attempt to gather and analyse evidence about the application of LNOB principles across UNDP.

This chapter explains the history and significance of the LNOB and RFBF promise and how it is applied in UNDP. Chapter 2 presents a brief methodological overview. In Chapters 3 through 5, key findings are presented concerning the organization's (a) strategic positioning with regard to LNOB and RFBF; (b) institutional effectiveness in integrating LNOB principles; and (c) programmatic performance integrating LNOB by Signature Solution. The final chapter sets out forward-looking conclusions and recommendations, as well as six lessons captured from UNDP and other organizations on integrating LNOB/RFBF principles.

1.1 Background

> *"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.**" (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)*[8]

There is overwhelming evidence that progress under the Millennium Development Goals was achieved by the relatively better-off, rather than by those who were among the most left behind; non-discrimination, equality and equity issues were insufficiently addressed.[9] In recognition of this, a central element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the achievement of inclusive development.

With less than half the journey to 2030 remaining, the global community finds itself in dangerous times. Contemporary global inequalities are close to reaching levels last seen in the early 20th Century. The widening gap is attributed by many to aggressive economic growth and industrialization policies, combined with a decrease in tax revenue and public spending that began in the 1980s.[10] The poorest half of the global population possesses just 2 percent of global wealth. In contrast, the richest 10 percent of the global population owns 76 percent of all wealth. Other threats, including climate change,

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8 United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 'Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', A/RES/70/1, 25 September 2015.

9 Vandemoortele, Jan, 'The MDG Conundrum: Meeting the targets without missing the point', *Policy Development Review*, vol. 27, No. 4, pp.355-371, July 2009; Stuart, Elizabeth and Jessica Woodroffe, 'Leaving No-one Behind: Can the Sustainable Development Goals succeed where the Millennium Development Goals lacked?', *Gender & Development*, vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 69-81, 2016.

10 Chancel, L. et al, 'World Inequality Report 2022', World Inequality Lab, Paris, 2021, p.166.

a cost-of-living crisis, armed conflict, a global pandemic, and persistent patterns of marginalization on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and other social identities, add to the sharp increase in inequalities.[11]

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has worsened inequality, both within and between countries. Global billionaire wealth grew by $4.4 trillion between 2020 and 2021 alone, while more than 100 million people fell below the poverty line,[12] some of whom are at risk of famine.[13] Those 'left behind' prior to COVID-19 have suffered the most from the pandemic's economic aftermath—in particular, from the loss of jobs, disproportionately concentrated in predominantly-female, low-wage service sectors.[14] The fact that poorer people and minorities saw a further reduction in life expectancy[15] and the worst educational setbacks as schools closed or moved online points to a potentially longer-term aggravation of inequality and deprivation.[16]

In the face of growing inequalities, in 2020 the United Nations Secretary-General called for a new social contract. "The time has come to replace the broken social contract and to create a new one geared to greater inclusion and sustainability." The 20th Century bargain between economic growth, redistribution and social protection cannot sustain the transformative aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, including the commitment to Leave No One Behind.[17]

'Leaving no one behind' is thus a central transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It represents the political commitment of all United Nations Member States to eradicate poverty, discrimination and exclusion, and to reduce the inequalities that undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole. This is a step-change in the global development consensus for two reasons. First, LNOB recognizes that inequalities within and among countries are rising, and that sources of inequalities are often multiple and intersecting. Second, it openly acknowledges many of the root causes that keep individuals and groups from leading the lives they aspire to.

'Reaching the Furthest Behind First', the second part of the LNOB pledge, obliges duty-bearers not only to make the invisible visible and support the hard-to-reach, but to make this a priority. Fulfilling this obligation will require the generation and disaggregation of additional data to ensure that all grounds of discrimination prohibited under international law, social norms and other causes of

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11 Chancel, L., op. cit; Kharas, Homi and Meagan Dooley, 'The Evolution of Global Poverty, 1990-2030', Brookings Global Working Paper #166, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2022. It is worth noting that the World Inequality Database calculates 'household wealth' only, and this number does not take into consideration taxes levied on financial assets (which account for an important share of this figure).

12 Stiglitz, Joseph E., 'COVID Has Made Global Inequality Much Worse', *Scientific American*, vol. 326, No. 3, pp. 52-53, March 2022.

13 See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022', FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, World Food Programme and World Health Organization, Rome, 2022. Note that the issue of food insecurity was further exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, 'Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, June to September 2022 Outlook', FAO & World Food Programme, Rome, 6 June 2022.

14 International Labour Organization (ILO), 'An Uneven and Gender-Unequal COVID-19 Recovery: Update on gender and employment trends 2021', policy brief, ILO, Geneva, October 2021, p. 8.

15 Many studies found that COVID-19 mortality rates were higher among poorer countries and minorities within G-20 countries: Guglielmi, Georgia, 'COVID was twice as deadly in poorer countries', *Nature*, 28 June 2022. Also: Schellekens, Philip and Diego Sourrouille, 'COVID-19 Mortality in Rich and Poor Countries: A tale of two pandemics?', World Bank policy research working paper, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 28 May 2020.

16 Haelermans C. et al., 'Sharp Increase in Inequality in Education in Times of the COVID-19-Pandemic', *PLoS ONE*, vol. 17, No. 2, 2 February 2022.

17 Guterres, António, 'Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A new social contract for a new era', message by the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the 18th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture, 18 July 2020.

inequalities are identified and can be addressed. It also necessitates the political will to ensure access to services and the realization of rights in areas where quick results are least likely and visibility is lowest. Reaching the Furthest Behind First has received less attention by Member States and the international community overall.

To institutionalize LNOB, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination devised a whole-of-system Shared Framework for Action[18] mandating United Nations entities to focus on three interrelated elements:

- Equality – "the imperative of moving towards substantive equality of opportunity and outcomes for all groups."
- Non-discrimination – "the prohibition of discrimination against individuals and groups on the grounds identified in international human rights treaties."
- Equity – which refers to fairness in the distribution of costs, benefits and opportunities.

The United Nations system also has a standing legal mandate and a central duty to promote and encourage respect for human rights, including the principles of equality and non-discrimination, through the 1945 Charter of the United Nations. The human rights-based approach (HRBA) has been a guiding principle of the United Nations since the 1990s; under it, the plans, policies and processes of development must be anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law.[19]

The concepts of LNOB and RFBF do not focus on countries' legal obligations, but rather establish a broad political consensus, compelling Member States to focus on inequalities and discrimination that undermine the agency of people as holders of rights, as well as on equity or the fair distribution of costs, benefits and opportunities. It is understood by its advocates as a push to complement and further the HRBA from an advocacy perspective, taking into account political realities and sensitivities.[20] Both HRBA and LNOB/RFBF principles seek to address inequalities and factors of exclusion that lie at the heart of development challenges, and to redress the discriminatory practices and unjust distribution of power that impede development.'Leave No One Behind' was elevated to one of six guiding principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in 2019, and now features prominently in the strategic plans of many multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental development organizations.[21]

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[18] United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, '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.

[19] The HRBA requires human rights principles (universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability) to guide United Nations development cooperation, and to focus on developing the capacities of 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations, and of 'rights-holders' to claim their rights. This is anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law, including all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and the right to development. See: United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 'Universal Values – Principle One: Human Rights Based Approach', accessed 2022; Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development, 'Leave No One Behind (LNOB) and the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)', factsheet, SDC, February 2021.

[20] Critics might argue that LNOB instead waters down the HRBA, advocating for a paternalistic approach that discounts the agency of those "left behind" and implying a development model that privileges growth at the expense of sustainability. See, for example, Najafizada, Maisam and Sunisha Neupane, 'Leaving No One Behind' Conveys a Paternalistic Approach to Development', The Conversation, 11 December 2018.

[21] See, for example, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Children's Fund, Oxfam, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ).

1.2 UNDP adaptation and integration of LNOB principles

While LNOB terminology is characteristic of the post-2015 era, UNDP has been pursuing related approaches since the 1990s.[22] Specific LNOB language was introduced in UNDP strategic plans (SPs) in 2018, through a 'common chapter' jointly issued by UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).[23] The 2018-2021 SP associated LNOB with "universality" (para. 21) and "equality and universality" (para. 25).[24]

The 2022-2025 SP fully elevates LNOB to one of three "directions of change". It also offers a definition of LNOB as: "a rights-based approach centred on empowerment, inclusion, equity, human agency and human development capabilities which recognizes that poverty and inequality are multidimensional".[25] This definition indicates that in UNDP understanding, LNOB is closely linked to poverty and inequality (Signature Solution 1),[26] while also having a cross-cutting character. Noteworthy is the omission of "reaching the furthest behind first" from the 2022-2025 SP, which was present in the common chapter in 2018.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP identified "a rights-based social contract grounded on greater solidarity" and "a decisive move on inclusion and diversity including gender equality" as two of seven 'tipping points' on the pathway to recovery in its COVID 2.0 offer.[27]

The organization's approach to LNOB integration can be characterized as follows: first, it is informed by the human development concept, emphasizing human agency.[28] Second, it promotes context-specific approaches, starting from an analysis of who is left behind. Third, it attempts to shift the debate towards an intersectional understanding of different factors that combine to leave people behind and need to be addressed in programming.

At the heart of the organization's approach is the 2018 discussion paper "What Does it Mean to Leave No One Behind?"[29] This paper introduced the notion that LNOB integration comes about through a focus on 'examine' (disaggregated and people-driven data and information), 'empower' (civic engagement

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22 The 1998 UNDP Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which focused on building on the "wealth of the poor", can be considered a precursor to the LNOB principle. In the 2000s, UNDP produced various Human Development Reports focusing on human rights and social exclusion in development programming. In 2005, UNDP published a Practice Note on Human Rights in UNDP. In 2010, UNDP issued a resource guide and toolkit on "Marginalized Minorities in Development Programming". Former UNDP Administrator Helen Clark referred to "those left behind" in a speech as far back as 2010: United Nations, 'UN Official Pledges Continued Support for National Human Rights Bodies', UN News, New York, 23 March 2010, accessed 17 October 2022.

23 The development agencies noted 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 […]". United Nations, Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, Special Session 2017; see also UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP, New York, 2021, p.3.

24 United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018–2021', UNDP, New York, 2017.

25 United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022–2025', UNDP, New York, 2021, p.7.

26 Since 2018, UNDP has organized its interventions into six 'Signature Solutions'. The current Signature Solutions are: 1. poverty and inequality; 2. governance; 3. resilience; 4. environment; 5. energy; 6. gender equality. See UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

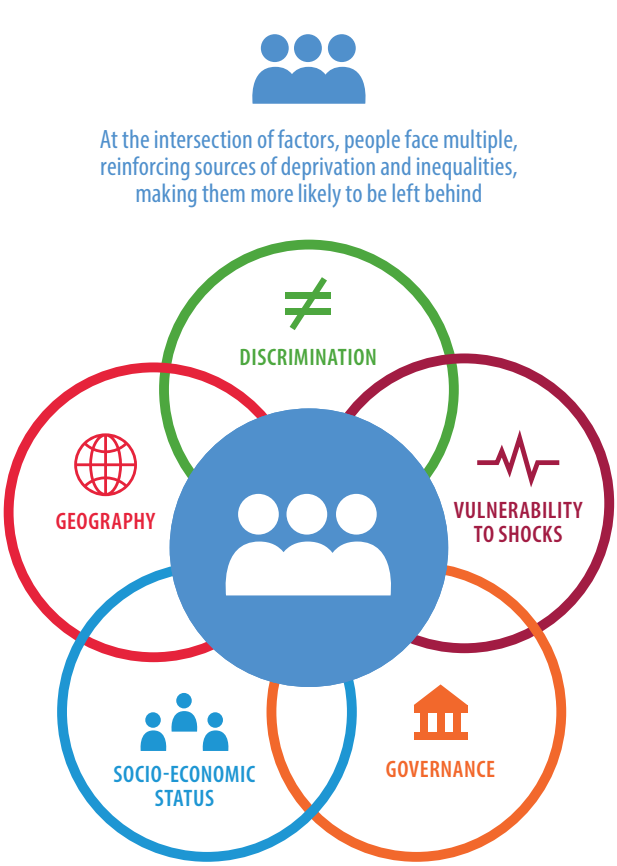
27 United Nations Development Programme, 'Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030', UNDP, New York, 2022.

28 Human development is defined as the process of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities and improving their well-being. Human development – or the human development approach – is about "expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live". United Nations Development Programme, 'Human Development Reports: What is human development' (website, accessed 2022).

29 United Nations Development Programme, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation', UNDP, New York, 2018.

and voice) and 'enact' (integrated, equity-focused SDG policies, interventions and budgets)[30] and coined five factors that intersect to produce disadvantage and deprivation: discrimination, geography, governance, socio-economic status, shocks and fragility (*see Figure 1 below*). The document also states that "all persons living in extreme poverty can … be considered 'left behind'" (p.3) – reconnecting LNOB with the UNDP mandate and the focus on Signature Solution 1 (poverty and inequality).

FIGURE 1. UNDP five-factor framework for leaving no one behind



DISCRIMINATION:
on the basis of assumed or ascribed identity or status
Consider: SDG outcomes and opportunities by sex, age, disability and social groups (as specified in the 2030 Agenda); evidence and recommendations from International human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions

GEOGRAPHY:
isolation, risk or exclusion due to location; includes environmental degradation, transport, technology
Consider: SDG outcomes and opportunities broken down by sub-national locality; inequities in mobility related to transport and internet access

VULNERABILITY TO SHOCKS:
includes conflict, climate, environmental
Consider: places or populations that endure more frequent and/or severe setbacks due to natural or environmental disasters, violence, crime or conflict, economic or other shocks

GOVERNANCE:
laws, policies, institutions, voice and participation (includes informal and traditional governing systems)
Consider: impact of laws, policies, taxes, budgets, formal and traditional practices by sub-population and locality (i.e. distributional impacts); ability to participate in government and decision-making; civic space

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:
multidimensional poverty, inequalities
Consider: multidimensional poverty of women, men and children; Gini coefficient; inequalities-weighted Human Development Index; SDG outcomes and opportunities by income (and/or Multidimensional Poverty Index quintile; sources on informal and vulnerable employment (see: www.ilo.org/ilostat/)

Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), 'LNOB: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UNCTs', UNSDG 2019/2022, p.13

[30] United Nations Development Programme, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation', UNDP, New York, 2018.

In 2018 UNDP introduced an 'LNOB marker' (also known as 'Who's marker'). The LNOB marker is an 'enumerative list' of 18 groups (*see Table 1*), clustered around four of the five LNOB factors mentioned above, i.e. socio-economic status, discrimination, geographic location, and vulnerability to shocks and fragility. There is no marker for the fifth LNOB factor, governance. The LNOB marker is used to indicate target/beneficiary groups at the project output level. Each output can be linked to up to five 'LNOB groups'.

TABLE 1. Groups identified by the LNOB marker

Main LNOB factor	Related LNOB groups identified by the marker
Socio-Economic	People living in multidimensional poverty
	Unemployed persons
	People living under the national poverty line
Geographic Location	People living in rural areas
	People living in urban areas
	People living in peri-urban areas
	People living in slums
Discrimination ("Status")[31]	Women
	Youth
	Minorities (e.g. race, ethnicity, linguistic, religion, etc.)
	Persons with disabilities (PwD)
	Key populations for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria
	Sexual and gender orientation
Vulnerability to Shocks and Fragility	Persons negatively affected by armed conflict or violence
	Internally displaced persons
	Persons directly affected by natural disasters
	Refugees
	Migrants

Source: Data from PowerBI Project-Based Portfolio Analytics, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) Development Effectiveness, as of May 2022

A pilot and first of its kind among development agencies, the marker is still fraught with conceptual challenges. For example, by compounding the LNOB and Who's marker, it assumes that all women, or people in rural or urban areas, etc., are 'left behind'. Some of the 18 marker groups are very specific, others less so.[32] Further, the marker does not fully operationalize the five-factor framework put forward

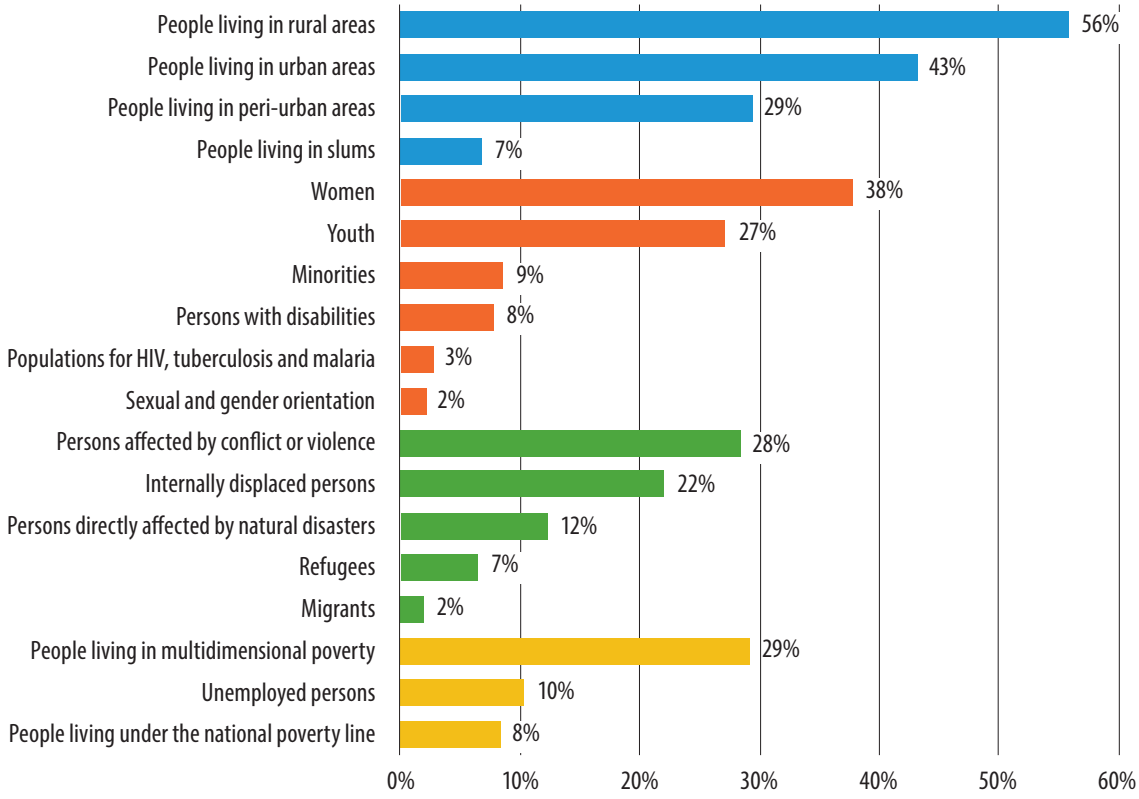
[31] In the internal marker data, the LNOB factors are referred to as "parent titles". The parent title "status" refers to what is termed "discrimination" in the five-factor framework (sex, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc.), while the parent title "socio-economic" refers to income and wealth differentials.

[32] For instance, there is a marker for certain age categories (e.g. youth) but not others (e.g. elderly), and for certain historically marginalized populations ("minorities [race/linguistic/religion]") but not others ("indigenous peoples").

in Figure 1 above and does not consider intersectionality, or the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. As there is no mechanism in the LNOB marker to cross-tabulate or indicate overlaps, the extent to which UNDP targets at the intersections of groups – rural women, youth living with disabilities – remains unclear.

A look at the data generated by the LNOB marker nevertheless provides useful approximations. For example, in 2021, 86 percent of all UNDP projects reported targeting at least one of the LNOB groups through one or more of its outputs.[33] Globally, more than two thirds of UNDP programme outputs targeted a geographically defined group, and half targeted groups based on their identity (linked to the factor of discrimination). Groups vulnerable to shocks and fragility or associated with their socio-economic status were targeted by around 40 percent of outputs. Figure 2 below shows the fraction of outputs linked with each marker group, indicating that the most targeted populations were people in rural and urban areas and women, and the least targeted were migrants, people with minority sexual and gender orientation, and populations living with HIV, tuberculosis and malaria.

FIGURE 2. Percentage of outputs targeting LNOB groups in 2021, colour-coded by parent LNOB factor



Geography; Discrimination (Status); Vulnerability to Shocks; Socio-Economic Status

Note: The total number of outputs (n=9818) represents UNDP outputs reporting at least one LNOB group in 2021. The outputs not linked to any LNOB group were not considered in the count. As many outputs are linked to more than one LNOB group, the total sum of percentages exceeds 100 percent.

Source: Data from PowerBI Project-Based Portfolio Analytics, BPPS Development Effectiveness, as of May 2022

[33] Each project output can be linked to up to five groups from the "LNOB marker" list. In 2021, there were 9,818 project outputs reporting one or more LNOB marker. One-third of them targeted the maximum five groups allowed by the tracking system. 12 percent of outputs targeted 1 LNOB group, 19 percent targeted 2 groups, 19 percent targeted 3 groups, and 16 percent targeted 4 groups.

There are differences in how UNDP targets specific groups across regions, and also among outputs associated with different Signature Solutions and types of interventions, which are presented in full in Annex 5. Note that country office tagging of one or the other marker group merely highlights a 'concern' with this particular population, or an attempt to ensure their 'inclusion' in programming. It does not give an indication as to the depth or quality of inclusion, and even less so of results achieved for any particular population deemed to be 'left behind'. It also does not signify that the same population would not have been targeted by UNDP without the LNOB principle in place.

Due to limitations of the marker system, specifically the inability to link the marker with expenditure and results reporting at a more granular level than project outputs, it is not possible to determine how the interests of different 'LNOB groups' were financially supported by UNDP and partners. An overall approximation indicates that US$3.9 billion was spent by UNDP in 2021 on projects tagged to the 18 LNOB marker groups.[34]

[34] The estimate is established as 86 percent of US$4.5 billion, which was the total programme core and non-core expenditure in 2021 according to PowerBI Project Finance Analytics, BPPS Effectiveness Group, as of August 2022.

Chapter 2.

EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter sets out the evaluation purpose and scope, lists key evaluation questions, and briefly describes the evaluation methodology and limitations.

2.1 Purpose, objective, scope and utility of the evaluation

The evaluation aims to inform and accompany UNDP efforts to integrate LNOB principles throughout the organization's programmes and operations. It provides the Executive Board, UNDP management, and other stakeholders with an assessment of LNOB integration to date, as well as recommendations for improvement and lessons. This formative evaluation has a two-fold learning and accountability objective:

I. First, to generate lessons, conclusions and recommendations that contribute to decision-making and learning, with a view to improving the UNDP contribution to Agenda 2030. Recognizing the complexities of LNOB, the evaluation touches on conceptual and empirical elements.

II. Second, to support corporate accountability by assessing UNDP performance and contributions to date in delivering on its stated objective to integrate LNOB and RFBF, by identifying contextual, strategic and operational factors that positively and/or negatively influence progress.

The evaluation assesses key aspects of UNDP programmes and institutional effectiveness at global, regional and country levels, covering the period 2018 to mid-2022, with some attention to earlier strategic decisions and actions for background and contextualization. Within the limitations acknowledged in section 2.4, the evaluation attempts to:

a. Reconstruct and assess the appropriateness and coherence of the UNDP corporate approach to LNOB; trace the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of key UNDP contributions to inclusive and transformative change for select processes and initiatives, guided by equality, non-discrimination and equity principles; and

b. Assess UNDP institutional capacity, including data systems, as relevant, to address LNOB principles. LNOB-responsive operations (procurement, logistics, fiduciary services, etc.) were excluded from the scope due to lack of adequate time and data availability.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations generated by the evaluation are expected to be used to influence strategic direction, to inform theory and practice of UNDP interventions across Signature Solutions and to adjust institutional effectiveness in integrating LNOB.

2.2 Evaluation analytical framework, approach and questions

The evaluation was primarily formative and forward-looking, for two main reasons. First, it occurred while practical measures to integrate LNOB into UNDP programmes and operations were being designed or actively implemented, and therefore an organizational learning focus was timely. Second, there were evaluability challenges that limited the feasibility of a summative, or cumulative to date, assessment.[35] All IEO evaluations – formative, summative or otherwise – follow the same methodologically rigorous analytical steps to derive findings, conclusions and recommendations and require a management response by UNDP.

The evaluation included a series of targeted consultations for adequate contextualization and nuancing of the proposed forward-looking strategies:

- UNDP staff (co-identified by the IEO and UNDP management) accompanied the evaluation from beginning to end through a bespoke evaluation learning group.[36]
- Staff from the Accelerator Labs – considered important vehicles for organizational change in UNDP – were consulted through a dedicated Accelerator Lab drop-in session on LNOB.
- United Nations/UNDP staff shared insights through a SparkBlue consultation and discussion.[37]
- Civil society organizations from the Global South, brought together by the umbrella think-tank Southern Voice,[38] participated in two roundtable discussions (25 participants total).
- A three-member advisory panel of external experts provided quality assurance and state-of-the-art benchmarking at key stages of the evaluation process (inception, data collection/analysis, draft report stage, final report stage).

In addition to the usual consultations with staff, government counterparts, United Nations agencies and donors, the evaluation was designed to capture the perspective of those left furthest behind, notably by focusing primary data collection at the community level, both rural and urban, as described below (section 2.3). Figure 3 shows a reconstructed programme-impact pathway for LNOB integration in UNDP and details the scope of the evaluation.[39]

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[35] Key evaluability challenges are: 1. An implicit theory of change exists but is not sufficiently clear to serve as a basis for analysis. Therefore, the evaluation team developed an abridged results pathway for analysis. 2. The boundaries of "what is LNOB" and who is responsible for implementing it in UNDP are unclear. 3. The link between programmatic intent (per LNOB marker) and expenditures cannot be made due to systems limitations. 4. Monitoring data on results at intermediate steps of the results chain are lacking, as is impact-level data.

[36] Evaluation learning group ToR can be found in Annex 7. The group supported ToR development and participated in key workshops, at the inception and emerging findings stages of the evaluation.

[37] A moderated online consultation was held on the SparkBlue platform from 14 January to 22 February 2022, which gathered comments from UN/UNDP staff on "empowering marginalized groups". Its summary is available on the SparkBlue page.

[38] Southern Voice is an open platform bringing together 59 think-tanks from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia. Its aim is to address the existing 'knowledge asymmetry' and 'participation deficit' in the dialogue on development by producing, promoting and disseminating evidence-based policy analysis by researchers from Global South countries. See: Southern Voice.

[39] This framework was elaborated by the evaluation team in collaboration with the evaluation learning group during a workshop held on 1 February 2022. For the purpose of this evaluation, the definition of LNOB is as per the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, p.7.: "Leaving no one behind [is] a rights-based approach centered on empowerment, inclusion, equity, human agency and human development capabilities which recognizes that poverty and inequality are multidimensional". UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

FIGURE 3. Reconstructed programme-impact pathway for LNOB integration in UNDP

Integration of LNOB principles in UNDP **(Equality – Non-discrimination – Equity)**

UNDP CORE INVESTMENTS

Programmatic

Data and analytics: Providing conceptual clarity, metrics and assessments

Services: Contributing to strengthening the quality of public services; delivering services as provider of last resort, or for demonstration purposes upon request

Influencing: Catalysing global partnerships; acting as a neutral broker around sensitive issues; promoting integration; leveraging resources

Capacities/capabilities: Strengthening government capacities, including at decentralized level upon request; strengthening capacities of civil society organizations and national human rights institutions upon request; improving the opportunities and capabilities of the furthest behind people, groups and communities

SDGs: Promoting SDG localization and people-centred SDG reporting

Participation: Supporting inclusion of civil society; expanding spaces for participation of communities left furthest behind

Institutional

Conceptual clarity/programme guidance on LNOB

Operationalization through various entry points, including the human rights-based approach

LNOB-responsive management systems, including people management

External coherence, coordination and partnerships

EXCLUDED FROM EVALUATION SCOPE: LNOB-responsive operations (procurement, logistics, fiduciary services, etc.)

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Programmatic

Data systems and knowledge

Capacities to "examine, empower and enact"

Access to services and quality of services

Regulatory framework and oversight structures

Social participation

Institutional

Organizational culture supportive of diversity, equity and inclusion

Enabling environment, incl. mechanisms and resources

Staff capacities and behaviour change

OUTCOMES

Governments have the ability to identify who is left behind, the political will, budget and capacity to effectively include those left furthest behind, and civil society is holding them accountable

IMPACT

No one is left behind

The furthest behind are reached first

ASSUMPTIONS TO BE ASSESSED

Clear mandate for LNOB

Effective organizational leadership and support

Corporate integrity/accountability mechanism

Sufficient financial and human resources for LNOB integration

Adequacy and comprehensiveness of interventions: (e.g. using poverty depth instead of head count, gender-responsiveness)

ASSUMPTIONS TO BE ASSESSED

Coherent contribution of other (national and international) actors

Functioning civil society

ASSUMPTIONS TO BE ASSESSED

Coverage and scale (geographical)

Reach (marginalized groups)

ENABLERS

Context indicators: better governance; higher human development; higher per capita income; higher gender equality

Source: IEO developed based on UNSDG, 'LNOB: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UNCTs', UNSDG 2019/2022, pp. 23, 25, 27; UNDP PowerBI Project-Based Portfolio Analytics, BPPS Effectiveness Group as of October 2021; United Nations, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', United Nations, 2015.

The evaluation was mainly guided by four evaluation questions aligned to the following criteria:

1. **COHERENCE**: How coherent are UNDP strategies, procedures and guidance with regard to integrating the LNOB principle, including RFBF?
2. **EFFICIENCY**: Has UNDP made the best use of scarce resources (human/financial/social capital) to expeditiously integrate the LNOB principle as committed, including RFBF?
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?

The impact and sustainability of interventions was not fully assessed due to the formative nature of the evaluation, but the adequacy of programme design to allow for future impact and sustainability was considered.

2.3 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, drawing on quantitative and qualitative sources for data collection and analysis. It combined five lines of inquiry:

An **institutional assessment** reviewed conceptual clarity of LNOB and RFBF in UNDP; operationalization through guidance, processes and tools; resources (human and financial) invested; and corporate ability to capture and credibly report results based on evidence. Main data sources included queries to corporate systems (financial data, human resource data, results reporting including programmatic markers such as the LNOB and gender markers), key informant interviews with UNDP staff at global, regional and country levels, document review, review of internal social media and a SparkBlue consultation with staff.

A **programmatic assessment** reviewed UNDP strategic positioning, lessons based on past performance and emerging opportunities for contributions to results, by UNDP Signature Solution, with the assessment of enablers being mainstreamed to the Signature Solutions.[40] The assessment is based on a sample of ten countries for which in-depth desk reviews were conducted and five focus countries where primary data collection took place. Data sources included: site observations; key informant interviews and focus groups at community level with beneficiaries, community members, implementers and local experts (local government, media, academics, elders, advocates); key informant interviews with UNDP staff at global, regional and country levels, and with selected external stakeholders; extensive document review, including of national statistics, United Nations Sustainable Development Frameworks/United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, common country assessments, country programme documents, results-oriented annual reporting, and analysis of 4,767 past UNDP evaluations using artificial intelligence. Two recent IEO rapid-assessment Reflections papers,[41] past corporate evaluations, 2021 Independent Country Programme Evaluations of the five focus countries, and project evaluations in the area of LNOB were also reviewed to complete the evidence base.

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[40] The current UNDP Signature Solutions are: poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, energy and gender equality. Enablers are: digitalization, strategic innovation and development financing. See UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

[41] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Reflections - Lessons from Evaluations: UNDP support to empowering marginalized groups', UNDP, New York; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Reflections - Lessons from Evaluations: Civil society engagement in leave no one behind programming', UNDP, New York.

Two **thematic deep-dives** were conceived as an exploration of the 'political dimension' of UNDP LNOB work. Two overarching claims were tested using the process-tracing methodology: (1) UNDP helps improve livelihoods for the furthest behind by supporting governments in determining who is 'left behind'; (2) UNDP strengthens political participation of the furthest behind via effective coalition-building in support of more inclusive models of governance.[42] Email exchanges, internal presentations, training materials, track changes in draft documents and conference video footage were used to trace the UNDP contribution, in addition to key informant interviews and a broader review of published and unpublished documents, press statements, tweets and corporate data.

A **study of comparator organizations** provided a comparative benchmarking and lessons for UNDP consideration. It highlighted good practices in LNOB integration observed in ten organizations with related mandates, based on an in-depth desk review, key informant interviews and two roundtable discussions.[43]

A **civil society organization survey** gathered more ample external views on the relevance and effectiveness of UNDP work from those representing and in close contact with the most left behind populations.

Sampling: To assess LNOB integration, a purposive sample was drawn in consultation with the evaluation learning group, prioritizing countries with high potential for lesson-learning, and considering regional spread, variety in development settings, and diversity of LNOB issues and initiatives as per the five-factor framework (*see Chapter 1, Figure 1*). Table 2 below shows the selected 15 country cases, with further detail presented in Annex 3.[44]

TABLE 2. Sample of UNDP country-level initiatives assessed, by UNDP region and type of data collection

	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States	Latin America and the Caribbean
Focus Country	Central African Republic	Egypt	India	Moldova	Ecuador
Desk Review Countries	Uganda Nigeria	Yemen Jordan	Fiji Afghanistan	Turkey Kazakhstan	Haiti Dominican Republic

Source: IEO developed

[42] This claim did not yield sufficient evidence to warrant inclusion in the report. See limitations, section 2.4.

[43] The ten organizations were: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, European Commission, GIZ, the LNOB Partnership, Oxfam International, United Nations Environment Programme, UNFPA, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, UN Women.

[44] Specific selection criteria were regional balance (UNDP regions), mix of development settings in terms of economy (upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, low-income) fragility (very fragile, fragile, not fragile), gender equality (Gender Development Index) and poverty and inequality measures (Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) indices; Gini coefficient). In addition, sampling considered programme spending on LNOB groups and issues (high-medium-low), results in LNOB integration (as per self-assessment/results-oriented annual reporting (ROAR) and implementation rate: successful–mixed–less successful cases), and evaluability (high for focus countries, both in principle and in practice).

The evaluation findings were informed by the views and insights of nearly 1,000 persons, of which about half (453 persons) participated in a survey and the other half (528 persons) participated in key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Out of these, 265 persons participated at community level as individuals who are currently benefitting or who benefitted in the past from UNDP-supported services, their wider communities, programme implementers and local experts *(see Figure 4 for demographic information and Annex 7 for further details*). The share of women interviewed from each country and relating to each Signature Solution was between 40-60 percent, with the exception of Signature Solution 6 (gender equality), where 70 percent were female. A further 263 interviewees and discussion participants partook as institutional or expert stakeholders, most of them from UNDP, other United Nations institutions or related organizations. The evaluation faced some challenges in ensuring representation from all 'LNOB groups' as resources were limited, compounded with impediments related to COVID-19 (*see below*).

FIGURE 4. Breakdown of community-level respondents

Source: IEO developed (n=265)

Ethical approvals: Ethical approval for the evaluation methodology was granted by an external ethical review board (*see Annex 8*). The ethical protocol included, among other things: verbal informed consent from all participants, electronic written consent from civil society survey participants, and a protection protocol for human subjects and data/privacy concerns. All evaluators contracted for the evaluation signed the United Nations Evaluation Group Pledge of Commitment to Ethical Conduct in Evaluation, and field-level staff received two bespoke trainings on ethical data collection to follow the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020).[45]

Data analysis: The evaluation used a mix of standard data-analysis methods, such as theory-based analysis[46] of actual versus intended results and influencing/hindering factors, including from a gender and disability perspective as required by the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).[47] A most significant change-inspired analysis was performed on interview/focus group data from programme beneficiaries and implementers, to understand to what extent change facilitated by UNDP led to improved lives and livelihoods and to help identify factors affecting UNDP performance.

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[45] United Nations Evaluation Group, 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation, 2020', UNEG, New York. The potential benefits of participating in this evaluation are likely to be indirect, as information from the evaluation will contribute to the improvement of UNDP strategies and programmes, but harms were considered to be very low.

[46] Cook, T. D., 'The False Choice Between Theory-Based Evaluation and Experimentation', *New Directions for Evaluation*, vol. 2000, No. 87, pp.27-34; Weiss, Carol H., 'Theory-Based Evaluation: Past, present and future', *New Directions for Evaluation*, vol. 1997, No. 76, pp.41-55.

[47] The UN-SWAP is a UN system-wide accountability framework designed to measure, monitor and drive progress towards a common set of standards to which to aspire and adhere for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. See: UN-SWAP, A plan to improve gender equality and the empowerment of women across the UN system.

The main analytical prism for this formative evaluation was qualitative content analysis, or textual analysis[48] (of quantitative and qualitative sources), and discourse analysis (power analysis).[49] The analysis of programmatic results was based on the 2018 LNOB guidance that recommends three mutually reinforcing 'levers' for implementation.[50] Three evaluators rated the extent to which each Signature Solution contributes to each lever in order to ensure inter-rater reliability. The assessment of programmatic results and organizational effectiveness additionally adopted a limited summative lens, retrospectively determining to what extent UNDP is contributing to set objectives. For this, the evaluation took a generative (or mechanism-based) approach to causality inspired by process tracing.[51] To analyse the extent and depth of gender-related approaches and results, the IEO gender results effectiveness scale was employed, classifying results between gender negative, blind, targeted, responsive or transformative.[52]

The evaluation used artificial intelligence to determine, based on past evaluations, to what extent UNDP achieved results in support of the various LNOB groups identified in the LNOB marker.[53] To do so, the IEO Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) system identified 4,767 past UNDP evaluation reports of relevance, which were tagged and analysed through human manual inductive and deductive coding and assessment.[54] Keywords were agreed upon for each of the 18 LNOB groups, and results were filtered to include the period under evaluation.

Finally, evidence was contrasted and compared, and patterns synthesized into key findings. These were distilled into lessons, higher level conclusions, and forward-looking formative recommendations.

2.4 Challenges and limitations

The scoping phase of the evaluation included a basic evaluability assessment on whether LNOB integration in UNDP follows a clear and coherent logic, measured through well-articulated indicators of success, and whether data requirements have been fulfilled. Evaluability was deemed moderate, reinforcing the need for a formative approach. The evaluation worked with the best available information, but recognizes quality and coverage issues given restrained evaluability.

For lack of a counterfactual, the evaluation could not determine whether some of the programmatic results reported in chapter 5 were prompted by the integration of the LNOB principles and a subsequent mindset shift in UNDP, or whether they instead included 'rebranding' of results that would have occurred anyway as LNOB integration.

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48 See Miles, Matthew B. et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A methods sourcebook*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, 2019.

49 See Van Dijk, Teun A., 'Discourse, Power and Access', in Caldas-Coulthard, Carmen Rose et al., *Texts and Practices*, Routledge, London, 1995.

50 UNDP, What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind?

51 Collier, David, 'Understanding Process Tracing', *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 44, No.4, pp.823-830. For a quick overview of application in evaluations see the process tracing entry in INTRAC's monitoring and evaluation universe.

52 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES): A methodology guidance note', UNDP, New York.

53 The 18 LNOB groups are enumerated in Table 1.

54 Inductive analysis was conducted for all 18 groups, deriving insights ground-up from past evaluations. In addition, a deductive process was followed for select groups, using a top-down approach starting from multiple premises assumed to be true, extrapolated from past thematic evaluation findings, and used as benchmarks. This type of analysis allowed the evaluation to track evidence on UNDP progress (or lack thereof) in its work with the select LNOB groups.

More disaggregated monitoring data would have been desirable to better assess LNOB and RFBF integration, as well as fine-grained input such as meeting minutes, emails, training or presentation materials, track-changes on draft legislation, etc. needed to assess the UNDP contribution through the process-tracing method used. This kind of data were not always available or accessible due to staff turnover and poor information management systems.

This evaluation was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring considerable flexibility (e.g., substitution of team members to manage illness and well-being and to avoid delays, and exclusively remote data collection for IEO staff). To mitigate related limitations, national evaluators were hired in focus countries for data collection. Respecting local safeguards, these national evaluators/data collectors were able to move freely in the national territory and collect data in local languages reaching more rights-holders from various population groups.

Chapter 3.

ASSESSMENT OF UNDP STRATEGIC APROACH AND POSITIONING

This chapter examines the strategic approach and positioning of UNDP with regard to integration of LNOB in its programming. It assesses the UNDP niche and value added in the United Nations system and beyond with respect to the three interrelated LNOB elements (equity, equality and non-discrimination), as well as the extent to which UNDP has been relevant and effective in achieving results for certain populations considered left behind. Lastly, it examines how effectively UNDP has engaged with strategic partners to reach the furthest behind.

3.1 UNDP niche and value added

Finding 1 – UNDP niche and value added: Given the organization's early adoption of the LNOB agenda as well as its broad country presence, convener role and growing innovation and digital work, the organization is well positioned to help bring clarity, leadership and practical approaches on better integrating the principles of leaving no one behind.

The broadness and vagueness of LNOB principles severely limit the extent to which they can be applied in practice. The intrinsic lack of clarity – which was perhaps intentional in order to "accommodate multiple perspectives"[55] – has been noted by several scholars.[56] As outlined in chapter 1, LNOB originated as a political commitment of Member States. Interview respondents within UNDP noted that, for now, LNOB works best as a communications tool, and less well as a programmatic principle. Country-level officers explained that the terms "leaving no one behind" and "reaching the furthest behind first" do not translate well into many languages. Since the SP 2022-2025 has elevated LNOB to an organization-wide priority ("direction of change"), staff expect the organization to provide more operational clarity and guidance on what this means in practice.

UNDP was an early adopter on LNOB following the General Assembly resolution that disseminated the LNOB principle in 2015. Several sources from other United Nations agencies corroborated the view that UNDP staff were the driving force behind the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) work on LNOB, including country pilots. Content analysis also shows that the United Nations system-wide guidance on operationalizing LNOB[57] heavily draws on the UNDP discussion paper, "What does it mean to leave no one behind?" and its five-factor framework.[58] The UNDP five-factor framework has been

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55 Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and Thea Smaavik Hegstad, 'Leaving no one behind' as a site of contestation and reinterpretation', CDP Background Paper No. 47, UNDESA, New York, 2018, pg. 5.

56 Klasen, Stephan and Marc Fleurbaey, 'Leaving No One Behind: Some conceptual and empirical issues', CDP background paper No. 44, United Nations, New York, 2018.

57 United Nations, 'Operationalizing Leaving No One Behind: Good practice note for UN country teams', UNDSDG, New York, 2022, pp.11-13. UNDP was a co-author of this document, initially published as interim guidance in 2019. The document was finalized following multiple years of consultation and three country level pilots (Nepal, Tunisia, Cameroon).

58 UNDP, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind?'

applied to the work and research of other actors, such as the Gates Foundation and Southern Voice.[59] UNDP has yet to capitalize on this position to help bring clarity to the wider United Nations system and others applying the principles.

Going forward, three elements stand out that enable UNDP to potentially play a leadership role. First, UNDP has good potential to serve as a catalyst to address LNOB and RFBF given its presence in 170 countries and territories. A number of external interviewees acknowledged that UNDP has a unique and comprehensive overview of on-the-ground development challenges. UNDP is not mandated to work on any particular population likely to be left behind in sustainable development and is therefore well placed to adopt a contextualized and intersectional lens that is more data-driven (rather than mandate-driven). This sets UNDP apart from other United Nations entities such as UNICEF (mandated to safeguard the rights of all children), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (mandated to aid and protect refugees) or UN-Women (mandated to further gender equality and the empowerment of women), for example. This is both positive and negative. Other agencies with core target populations can work on LNOB principles with clear definitions for the groups they serve. UNDP does not have this benefit and will therefore operate somewhat in generalizations; at the same time, UNDP has the freedom to adopt a more inclusive definition of being left behind.

Second, 85 percent of stakeholders consulted agreed that "LNOB integration is a key value added of UNDP Accelerator Lab work". Triangulated evidence showed that some of the labs offered new ways to connect with local communities and grassroots movements, sourcing solutions from the bottom up, collaborating with new and unusual partners and opening up new funding streams. However, in most country contexts, lab innovations did not pay full attention to LNOB and RFBF and were not yet integrated into mainstream programming, save for a few exceptions driven by the visionary and determined approach of individual staff members. In an attempt to address this problem, a systems-driven toolkit has been developed by the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) to help design portfolios of interventions that aim to foster conditions for inclusive, green, resilience work, drawing from important lab interventions in Uzbekistan, Bolivia, Ghana and Angola in the area of 'future of work'.[60] However, the evaluation was not provided evidence of the use or effectiveness of the toolkit, and it is not clear how BPPS has structured itself to monitor this type of data.

UNDP digital work also has an innovation focus in relation to LNOB. While LNOB was missing from the first 2019 digital strategy, the 2022-2025 digital strategy notes: "Digital has an impact on all of us. … Innovation supports inclusive design that can empower vulnerable populations to access digital services, help to mitigate risks from digital platforms, and establish accountability."[61] There have been some key successes in digitization benefiting the furthest behind populations. For example, in Haiti, UNDP supported the development of a unique register of beneficiaries that allows identification and selection of households living in conditions of extreme poverty, thereby helping better direct scarce public resources to them.[62] Additionally, the organization's new digital private sector partnerships offer significant opportunities for promoting LNOB and RFBF, some with a specific focus on reducing digital

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[59] Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 'The Goalkeepers Report 2019', Gates Foundation, 2019; Hathie, Ibrahima, 'Leave No One Behind: A cross-country synthesis', Southern Voices, 2020. In its Goalkeepers report, the Gates Foundation uses a "Layers of Inequality" diagram that is based on the UNDP five-factor framework. So does Southern Voices in its cross-country synthesis.

[60] 'Future of work' is a set of UNDP interventions aimed at tackling the changing nature of work through policies, capacity-building and development financing; see also the system-driven portfolio building toolkit.

[61] United Nations Development Programme, 'Digital Strategy, 2022-2025', UNDP, New York, 2021, p.25.

[62] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Haiti', UNDP, New York, 2020.

inequality.[63] Overall, the agency's record on digital transformation and LNOB is to date limited, but promising initiatives are underway (support to e-commerce systems, e-learning platforms, etc.) that may benefit furthest behind populations in the future.[64]

Third, UNDP was called upon by the General Assembly to act "as the support platform of the United Nations development system providing an integrator function in support of countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda".[65] This 'integrator function' and related comparative advantages of UNDP are pertinent for operationalizing LNOB principles at country level:

a. UNDP prides itself on elaborating holistic or 'integrated approaches' to address root causes of complex and deep-rooted development issues that would inform transformative policies and programmes down the line. Research on LNOB or technical expertise were less emphasized by interview respondents.

b. The 'SDG integration' role was underscored as a nodal position for UNDP at country level, giving the organization a unique entry point to help mainstream LNOB principles into national strategies and budgets,[66] including through Integrated National Financing Frameworks.[67]

c. The UNDP 'integrator role', i.e., leveraging the organization's positioning to work with and across whole-of-government and whole-of-society, bears great potential for LNOB and RFBF mainstreaming. For instance, UNDP contributed to United Nations Country Team-wide initiatives on chronic child malnutrition (Ecuador) and human rights in the Transnistrian region (Moldova), bringing strong partnerships with line ministries, coordination and resources. In both cases, specialized agencies contributed the bulk of the subject matter expertise. A cross-cutting and intersectional emphasis on the furthest behind, and a focus on equity, equality and non-discrimination could be emphasized by UNDP in the future.

Nevertheless, this evaluation found that some stakeholders view the integrator role as part of the UNDP identity, while others disagree.[68] In the absence of an agreed definition of the kind of integration function UNDP wants to assume with regard to LNOB, the envisioned value-added cannot at present be easily communicated or rigorously assessed. Yet with the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan and programmatic visions on each Signature Solution (*see chapter 5*), there is a recognized commitment to take this work forward, and a foundation on which to build in order to arrive at an agreed definition and an integrated approach.

The comparator study conducted as part of this evaluation demonstrated that other United Nations entities – especially the larger ones that have built their own implementation models and track records – are not currently looking to UNDP for expertise regarding LNOB. UNDP frameworks and tools, such

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63 United Nations Development Programme, 'Toward Collaborative and Interconnected Platforms for Digital Inclusion', UNDP, New York, 2021, and triangulated key informant interviews.

64 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Reflections - Lessons from Evaluations: UNDP Support to Digitalization in Crisis Countries', 2020.

65 United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 'Repositioning of the United Nations Development System in the Context of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System', A/RES/72/279, 9 May 2018, para. 32.

66 United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP Support to the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', UNDP, New York, 2016; triangulated data from key informant interviews.

67 United Nations, 'Integrated National Financing Frameworks', (website, accessed 2022).

68 At country level, the delinking of the Resident Coordinator role from UNDP still causes confusion four years down the line, and the complementarity of the Resident Coordinator's Office and UNDP regarding the integrator role for LNOB requires clarification.

as the LNOB marker and social and environmental standards, are not currently well known, but several interview participants cited UNDP as a trusted source on LNOB in connection with UNDP technical leadership of the COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs).[69]

3.2 LNOB principles (equality, equity, non-discrimination)

Finding 2 – Equality, equity and non-discrimination: While an emphasis on equity and equality has been intrinsic in UNDP, there is less focus on non-discrimination. For political and cultural reasons, UNDP usually followed a cautious approach; efforts to open civic space and facilitate difficult conversations to address power relations and social norms were found to be limited in many contexts.

The United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination mandated United Nations entities to focus on three interrelated elements when operationalizing LNOB: equality of opportunity and outcomes for all groups, non-discrimination, and equity or fairness.[70] The evaluation found that two of these components – equality and, to a lesser degree, equity – enjoy strong leadership support and buy-in across UNDP.

FIGURE 5. Representation of equality and equity

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 'Visualizing Health Equity', 2017.

[69] The digital SEIA toolkit, which expressly "recognizes and prioritizes the needs of the world's poorest populations", currently engages over 50 country offices, indicating the timeliness and pertinence of the tool.

[70] United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, 'Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development'. Equality refers to "the imperative of moving towards substantive equality of opportunity and outcomes for all groups". Non-discrimination is 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.

Inequality is seen as a paradox of our times: Prior to 2015, poverty had gone down in every region of the world and emerging markets were booming. Yet inequalities persisted and grew, intersecting and reinforcing each other and perpetuating intergenerational poverty and exclusion.[71] This realization led the international community to enshrine the equality principle in a standalone SDG, namely Goal 10: "Reduce inequality within and among countries". As inequality has jeopardized economic growth and created a serious barrier to eradicating poverty, the UNDP Signature Solution on poverty eradication has been renamed "poverty and inequality" as of the 2022-2025 SP.

Equity is a related concept, which is also endorsed by UNDP but less frequently used. The Transparency Portal[72] finds only 17 hits for equity, compared to 310 projects related to equality.[73] Equity is sometimes referred to as the pathway to equality; it describes the process of treating everyone equitably, or justly, according to their circumstance.[74] Various targeting measures supported by UNDP, such as some cash transfer programmes, are examples of an equity approach but are not usually labelled as such. Some UNDP publications, e.g. on gender and climate equity, or recently vaccine equity, as well as joint work with other United Nations entities explicitly use the word.[75] However, the term is rarely explained. Equity was not directly mentioned in any of the key informant interviews with UNDP staff unless prompted.

The organization's focus on non-discrimination, in contrast, remains relatively weak, both institutionally and in terms of results. Non-discrimination was rarely featured in results-oriented annual reporting (ROAR) during the period assessed, nor did it feature on the UNDP internet, intranet or in speeches.[76] The largest project associated with the search term 'non-discrimination' on the Transparency Portal received a fraction of the funding, at $1 million, of those tagged against 'equality' ($1,799 million) and 'equity' ($33 million).[77] While it is acknowledged that such a text search only captures a fraction of relevant projects, it still highlights the skewed importance given to equality and equity vs. non-discrimination. Rather than addressing structural discrimination, programmatic support places greater emphasis on enhancing access (to services, etc.) for those left behind. This is not necessarily transformative, e.g., if the system itself is repressive. According to UNDP, ROAR reporting is likely to focus more strongly on (non-)discrimination in the future, given a new indicator being monitored under the governance Signature Solution for the SP period 2022-2025 to assess the existence of systems with capacity to address the issue.[78]

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71 United Nations Development Programme, 'SDGs Today: Inequality', UNDP, accessed 2022.

72 Open.undp.org, UNDP's Transparency Portal, allows open, comprehensive public access to data on more than 10,000 UNDP projects and publishes data relating to projects worth more than $5.8 billion.

73 'UNDP Transparency Portal: Projects' (accessed 2022). Equity-related results are mainly at output level.

74 A simple example would be: Equality = All public schools in a community have computer labs with the same number of computers and hours of operation during school hours. Equity = Computer labs in lower income neighborhoods have more computers and printers, as well as longer hours of operation, as some students don't have access to computers or internet at home. From: "Racial Equality or Racial Equity?: The difference it makes," Race Matters Institute, 2014. Accessed 28 June 2022.

75 United Nations Development Programme, 'Support to Vaccine Equity – Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030', UNDP, New York, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 'Sustainability and Equity: A better future for all', Human Development Report 2011, UNDP, New York, 2011.

76 The expression "non-discrimination" is almost absent; therefore, "discrimination" was also considered as a search term. It was found mainly in relation to gender/LGBTQI+ issues, labour market-related discrimination, PwD, sexually transmitted infections, and race.

77 Law and order trust fund of Afghanistan (equality), examples for equity and non-discrimination will be added. The Transparency Portal showed a meagre two projects for 'non-discrimination' (and 32 for 'discrimination'). Both are small and non-discrimination is not the central narrative.

78 United Nations Development Programme, Integrated Results and Resources Framework, indicator # 2.2.2: "To what extent the country has targeted systems with strengthened capacities to: address discrimination; address racism; expand civic space", UNDP, New York, 2021.

There are many factors hindering access and the removal of longer-term barriers that are hard for UNDP to address. Discrimination is linked to intergenerational marginalization, cultural norms and values, etc., and the refusal of some governments to acknowledge the plight of certain populations makes it difficult for UNDP to engage. However, there is also evidence suggesting that UNDP often feels challenged to address non-discrimination given the views of some Member States. According to numerous interviewees, UNDP often feels the need to pay more attention to the authorizing environment at the expense of addressing sensitive political issues and social norms that are often intertwined with discrimination. This view is most strongly expressed by partner United Nations and development entities, but also by interviewees at UNDP headquarters (HQ) and regional levels.

In one of the countries examined for this evaluation, the lack of focus on non-discrimination and non-alignment with other United Nations voices was particularly problematic for UNDP when a Human Development Report (HDR) was launched. Human rights organizations subsequently complained about a misleading representation of the human rights situation in the country – something not unique to this country. Two of the claims made in this instance are of relevance to the evaluation: first, that historically marginalized and discriminated minority populations were not mentioned in the report and that the report conveys a positive picture of the housing situation in the region where this population resides. This is in direct contradiction of concerns raised by the United Nations Rapporteur on Housing. Second, that the HDR presents a non-critical reading of an anti-terror law passed in the country that has been sharply criticized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as "opening the door to more rights abuses". When interviewed for this evaluation, the UNDP country office (CO) in question conceded that the report committee did not include civil society and that there were communications shortfalls. Yet to the human rights defenders, UNDP "fell into the trap the government set out for it".

On the other hand, UNDP often speaks from a rights-based perspective. Two notable areas of work in this regard were rule of law and access to health interventions, where the organization contributed to demonstrable results in countering non-discrimination. UNDP global programmatic support to access to justice has expanded over the last 15 years to cover institution-building, transitional justice, gender justice, support to national human rights institutions, business and human rights, e-justice, and climate justice. The work is particularly geared towards fragile and conflict settings, and has seen growing expenditures over time.[79] Evidence at the country level suggests that results vary based on political will, local capacities and the volatility and polarity of contexts. For example, in Uganda, the Rule of Law and Constitutional Democracy flagship programme reached the elderly, persons affected by HIV/AIDS, youth, and female-headed households with legal aid. Through UNDP work, some persons otherwise excluded from the judiciary system due to persistent discrimination against them (or practical barriers to access) were able to have their cases heard.[80]

UNDP work in the health field in several cases addressed stereotypes, stigma and harmful socio-cultural patterns.[81] In Africa, UNDP launched an intersectional regional initiative targeting LGBTQI+ inclusion and young key populations. The projects focus squarely on rights, using health initiatives as one possible

[79] Notably UNDP programmes of assistance to the Palestinian People, Somalia, Guatemala and Paraguay.

[80] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Uganda', UNDP, New York, 2019.

[81] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Reflections – Lessons from Evaluations: UNDP support to the health sector', UNDP, New York, 2020; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Country Programme Evaluation: Cuba', UNDP, New York, 2019.

entry point.[82] Health is an important vehicle for fighting non-discrimination. For example, in some settings, social norms dictate that women must travel with male escorts to health-related appointments, and have limited decision-making power on decisions regarding their own bodies and health. UNDP and partners successfully supported key populations in Fiji, the Dominican Republic, and Egypt, including LGBTQI+, prison populations and sex workers with access to health. There were strong results reported for LGBTQI+ advocacy and inclusion in some contexts, considering that this is a sensitive issue that sometimes faces strong resistance both politically and culturally.[83] According to partners and community members interviewed in Egypt, a key gap is homeless populations who remain outside the reach of providers. Beneficiaries and service providers of the "Strengthening HIV and TB response" project in Cairo agreed that more inclusive language was needed in the communication of health services, as well as integrated services that go beyond short-term medical support, such as legal and psychosocial support, to ensure the sustainability of results. UNDP was more forthright than usual in these examples. Enabling factors included donor interest and funding, the instigation of senior managers, the drive of individual champions and links to civil society.

Interview respondents noted that the delinking from the United Nations Resident Coordinator function[84] and #NextGen leadership[85] at country office level may present opportunities for UNDP to speak up more forcefully on power relations, anti-corruption, harmful discrimination practices, etc. and for growing engagement with civil society as a catalyst for change.

Institutionally, a reform process is underway towards non-discrimination, diversity, equity and inclusion internally, e.g., through human resources reform (People for 2030), which pays attention to disability-inclusion and anti-racism, among others.

3.3 Populations served and intersectionality

Finding 3 – Populations served: UNDP has for decades invested in programmes that include populations left furthest behind. Contributions have been most evident in longstanding areas of engagement such as the empowerment of women and youth and the land rights of indigenous peoples. The organization has been less able to demonstrate results for marginalized sub-groups within targeted populations, such as persons with disabilities and the elderly.

UNDP has always worked to eliminate poverty and inequality, to include marginalized populations in political processes and to engage local populations in environmental conservation efforts. However, the introduction of the LNOB principles through Agenda 2030 and the UNDP SP, 2018-2021 has not yet led to a measurable step change. None of the thematic evaluations published during this period – on poverty reduction in the least developed countries, youth economic empowerment, the SP, 2018-2021, etc. – notes an increase of activities to reach the furthest behind.[86]

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[82] The #WeBelongAfrica programme is a regional initiative that integrates two UNDP-led projects, namely the Inclusive Governance Initiative and the Southern Africa Young Key Populations Inclusion Initiative. It currently covers Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe but is expected to engage with other countries across sub-Saharan Africa. Four of the five outcomes are about sexual and gender minorities and young populations, and are not exclusive to the health field.

[83] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Haiti'; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Subregional Programme Evaluation: Pacific countries', UNDP, New York, 2021.

[84] United Nations, 'Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System: Report of the Secretary-General', A/71/292/Rev.1, United Nations, New York, 27 September 2016.

[85] United Nations Development Programme, 'Strategic initiatives: #NextGenUNDP', (accessed 2022).

[86] At the same time, the attention in evaluation reports to left behind populations has increased, as evidenced by the number of excerpts relevant to one or more groups defined by the LNOB marker extracted from AIDA. For further details see Annex 5.

It is however noteworthy that more results, and greater depth of results, are reported for some populations. According to the AIDA system, groups most frequently mentioned in past evaluations were minorities and indigenous people, women, and people living in rural areas[87] – all longstanding UNDP target populations across portfolios. In most cases, these groups were targeted *a priori*, as a blanket category, and not based on specific contextualized vulnerability assessments,[88] despite the fact that the tools for these exist (*see finding 11*). For women in particular, corporate reporting and past evaluations show good coverage across Signature Solutions: UNDP contributed to improving rural women's safety through gender-responsive disaster preparedness,[89] increasing energy access for women in remote areas and their households,[90] and improving the lives and livelihoods of impoverished women through natural resource and waste management,[91] income-generating activities, enterprise skills development and community-oriented livelihood interventions.[92] There is some understanding of contextual factors that support or hinder achievement of results, and growing interest in how gender interacts with other potential vulnerabilities (living in a rural or urban area, being younger or older, etc.). In addition, young people were often at the centre of the UNDP country-level response, with many interventions focused on skills development and economic empowerment of young people.[93] Recognizing specific challenges faced by youth, these interventions have been found to bring psychological benefits and new abilities at the individual level, although with limited evidence of effects on livelihoods.[94]

UNDP was also able to effectively support indigenous peoples.[95] As described in more detail in finding 15, indigenous peoples were most successfully targeted within the environment portfolio, especially through the small grants programme. Primary data collection for this evaluation highlighted results brought specifically to indigenous women and youth, for example Bedouin women in Egypt who were supported to establish income-generating activities or microbusinesses, or indigenous youth in India who received training as para-hydrogeologists in support of their work to rejuvenate natural springs.[96] There were also notable results in supporting indigenous groups to claim their land rights, such as in Indonesia, where a previously unrecognized indigenous community obtained tenure rights to a forest it inhabits.[97]

Conversely, the evaluation found limited evidence of UNDP contributions to results for minorities defined by ethnicity, race or religion. Work in Eastern Europe to address the specific barriers and discriminatory practices for socio-economic integration of Roma women, Roma migrants and returnees stands out, but there was less evidence from other regions, regardless of whether the existence of minorities is contested or not. Past evaluations also revealed that groups that are economically inactive were

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87 See Annex 5.

88 This was noted especially for women and youth. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, ´Evaluation of UNDP Support for Youth Economic Empowerment´, UNDP, New York, 2022.

89 Successful examples include work of UNDP Kazakhstan on vulnerability assessment with a gender analysis and sex- and age-disaggregated data for the Almaty region, UNDP Uganda's production of gender-sensitive disaster assessment studies, and initiatives by UNDP Ecuador. See UNDP independent evaluations Kazakhstan, Ecuador and Uganda.

90 For example: UNDP independent evaluations for Peru, Uganda and Ecuador.

91 For example: UNDP independent evaluations for Nigeria and Uganda.

92 Examples include the GEF Small Grants programme implemented in various settings, e.g. by UNDP Ecuador.

93 Conclusions based on analysis of aggregated UNDP evaluations between 2018-2022 through AIDA.

94 Ibid.

95 Indigenous people are not one of the groups specifically identified by the LNOB marker, but they are included in the group called "Minorities (e.g. race, ethnicity, linguistic, religion, etc.)", which had to be further narrowed down by keyword searches.

96 See UNDP independent evaluations for Egypt and India.

97 Key informant interviews; United Nations Development Programme, 'Indonesia's Indigenous Communities Named 2020 Equator Prize Winners', press release, UNDP, Jakarta, 2020.

relatively less often targeted for support, including persons with disabilities (PwD) and the elderly.[98] Despite featuring in many country programme documents (CPDs) and the existence of several documented programme innovations,[99] PwD continue to be largely overlooked in programming across thematic areas and contexts, including in conflict settings. Deductive analyses supported by AIDA demonstrated that limited strides have been made since the thematic evaluation on disability in 2016 pointed out that "globally, UNDP is not widely regarded as a major advocate of or provider of technical assistance for disability-inclusive development and support to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".[100] This is unexpected given the agency's role as the biggest implementer of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020-2025), but results may need time to manifest on the ground before they can be captured by evaluations. The main reason put forward in past UNDP project and programme evaluations is relative lack of donor interest in PwD. There is also a significant lack of evidence on benefits brought to elderly people, who are largely invisible in UNDP monitoring as they are not listed among the 18 LNOB marker groups. Only four UNDP country offices specifically listed the elderly among the groups benefiting from their interventions in the self-reported ROAR exercise in 2021.[101] UNDP Cuba stands out for having made poverty among the elder population a programmatic priority.[102]

Overall, attention to heterogeneity within targeted populations, or intersectionality, is still insufficient.[103] The very notion of an 'LNOB group' (in line with the UNDP LNOB marker) may to some degree be counterproductive, as it further encourages a group-by-group approach to left-behind populations. The UNDP five-factor framework, with its focus on intersecting marginalization, the agency's niche as a producer and analyst of multidimensional population data, and its role as an integrator, all would suggest a more holistic and contextualized approach. Yet analysis by Signature Solution in chapter 5 of this report shows a somewhat siloed approach, where UNDP targets those considered poor, women, youth and indigenous, for instance, depending on Signature Solution and country programme outcome/output. The evaluation observed many instances of one project with one donor targeting, for example, indigenous peoples, and another in the same country office targeting "women and youth" (lumped together), without any interaction between programme designers/implementers. It is unclear to what extent UNDP has been intentional in focusing on certain populations and not others.

Targeting the furthest behind *within* population groups stands out as a challenge to UNDP. Past evaluations note that UNDP programming often paid little attention to heterogeneity in terms of economic status, age, education and skills level, etc. of intended project beneficiaries.[104] Sub-groups that are less visible and not formally organized (e.g. homeless people, persons with minority sexual

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98 UNDP has committed to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, and has been playing a key role in the UN Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, additional efforts are required to advance disability rights. Between 2018-2021, only 8 percent of project outputs directly targeted persons with disabilities and 3 percent targeted people living with HIV, malaria or tuberculosis. There is no marker for elderly people. The focus on economically active populations was also triangulated by field research data and noted in past evaluations, for instance in supporting livelihoods for Syrian refugees in Turkey. See UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach', UNDP, New York, 2020.

99 See, for example, Jackson, Ronald, 'Our Crisis Response Must Include People with Disabilities', UNDP blog, June 2021.

100 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of Disability-Inclusive Development at UNDP', UNDP, New York, 2016, p.xv.

101 Aggregated data from Results Oriented Annual Reporting 2021 (ROAR), section C.2.2.5.P.

102 UNDP independent evaluation, Cuba.

103 Analysis of aggregated UNDP evaluations between 2018-2022 through AIDA mentions the need for more thorough intersectional analysis of targeted populations in general, but especially in relation to targeting women, geographically defined groups, migrants and minorities.

104 See UNDP independent evaluations of Nigeria and Central African Republic (CAR).

or gender orientation, those living with cognitive disabilities) less frequently participated in projects. UNDP proxy work through organizations reduces its reach to those not served by existing channels. In the five countries examined by field-level data collectors for this evaluation, beneficiary selection for downstream initiatives often relied on the pre-existing networks of local partners, which in some cases leant towards established and formal groups and were found to replicate existing power relations and identification structures.[105] The approach for reaching the furthest behind first is also missing in planning and guidance, as discussed in finding 5.

Finding 4 – Intersectionality : Understanding of intersectionality remains limited in UNDP but is increasingly gaining traction, especially in work with persons with disabilities, women and youth. UNDP still lacks the guidance, tools and capacities to design, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes from an intersectional perspective.

Recognizing and addressing intersectionality is key to successful integration of the LNOB principles – not only equality and equity, but in particular non-discrimination. Intersectionality refers to the experience of overlapping, simultaneous systems of oppression.[106] Taking an intersectional approach requires a different kind of conceptualization and programming, focused on multiple identities of those left behind, and on context (historical, social, etc.). It would mean, for example, shifting from programming that supports 'rural women' to supporting 'rural women from certain ethnic backgrounds and living with disabilities'. The latter is more complex but closer to the lived experience of many of those left furthest behind.

Addressing intersectional discrimination has increasingly been part of UNDP advocacy efforts and is considered in its gender equality strategies (GES) since 2018. The first Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2021)[107] included intersectionality in its overview and references to transformative change. The main additional population considered was people with disabilities.[108] The updated strategy (2022-2025)[109] refers to sexual orientation and gender identity as forms of women's discrimination, and as part of the intersecting forms of *deprivation, disadvantage and discrimination* that should be addressed in all interventions.[110] It stresses the need for culture change to open the space to be more reflective about development challenges and learning from mistakes. This constitutes important progress, but the strategy remains conservative in other very important ways. For instance, while the GES recognizes sexual orientation and gender identity as potential dimensions of discrimination, it avoids direct reference to LGBTQI+ persons.

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105 See UNDP independent evaluation, CAR.

106 Crenshaw, Kimberle, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist policies', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, article 8, pp.139-167. Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined the concept of intersectionality through her examination of several legal cases in which employers discriminated against black women employees, but were not legally found to be discriminating on the separated grounds of race or sex alone. Crenshaw (1989) therefore argued the need for legal doctrine to take into account multiple facets of oppression – that is, racism and sexism – as having one whole, simultaneous effect on experience as opposed to the culmination of each separate aspect of identity.

107 UNDP, 'Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021', UNDP, New York, 2018.

108 UNDP institutional efforts towards intersectional approaches to disability inclusion include participation in the UN Inter-Agency Group on Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion led by UN Women and actively supporting the finalization of the draft statement on violence against girls with disabilities led by UNICEF.

109 UNDP Gender Equality Strategy, 2022-2025.

110 Ibid. See GES paragraph 3 on sexual orientation and gender identity as forms of discrimination affecting women, and paragraph 18 regarding the intersectional approach promoted by the GES.

When it comes to programme planning, implementation and monitoring, intersectionality remains little-known as a concept in UNDP. While some conceptual documents, for example the 2018 LNOB discussion paper,[111] emphasized the importance of understanding intersecting disadvantages, the practical application of intersectional inclusion remains elusive. Thematic areas where intersectional thinking appears to be gaining traction are social protection (principle of universal access to social protection) and disability inclusion: as per the LNOB marker, half of the organization's disability-focused projects also targeted women and a third also targeted youth. Qualitative examples were strong in the Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS region and included supporting access to inclusive vocational programmes for youth with disabilities in Armenia[112] and to community services in Bosnia and Herzegovina,[113] and establishing a health information hotline for women with disabilities in Turkmenistan.[114]

Nevertheless, UNDP still lacks clear guidance on when to use intersectional approaches and when these might not add value or could overly complicate the achievement of results. It is unclear in how far the UNDP approach to intersectionality fits in with the organization's well-defined approach to integration, which focuses on systems drivers of development complexity.[115] Understanding the complex, cumulative ways in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of those left furthest behind, should be a first step to designing programmes that target specific groups or individuals. To what extent it should also inform upstream work that is universal in aspiration, such as advocacy, policy support, building the capacities of government officials, etc., remains to be clarified. Programme and project documents (i.e., Country Programme Document (CPD), programme documents) rarely go beyond listing 'vulnerable groups' to explain why specific marginalized populations are prioritized.

Using the LNOB marker to assess the extent to which UNDP programmes are targeting people who are experiencing simultaneous systems of oppression is difficult. While 88 percent of all outputs in 2021 indicated targeting two or more populations listed by the marker as left behind, this may not indicate intersectional targeting: a large portion of these instances appear to signify simultaneous targeting of several geographical areas (e.g., 81 per cent of outputs tagging people in peri-urban areas also tagged people in rural areas and 67 per cent targeted people living in urban areas), or use of a narrowly defined geographical tag that also falls into a broader category by default (e.g., people in slums who are also living in peri-urban or urban areas).[116] In other cases, use of multiple marker tags highlights different aspects of the same factor (such as reporting forcibly displaced people both as "internally displaced populations (IDPs)" and "people affected by violence").[117]

There are, however, indications of UNDP programmes utilizing accurate intersectional targeting that considers multiple inequalities as per the UNDP five-factor framework. This is strongly the case for initiatives targeting women and youth. For example, 75 percent of outputs targeting indigenous people/people from a minority also targeted women, and a further 51 percent tagged youth, indicating a recognition of overlapping systems of oppression to be addressed. Searches through AIDA in past evaluations

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111 UNDP, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind?'.

112 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Armenia', UNDP, New York, 2019.

113 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Bosnia and Herzegovina', UNDP, New York, 2019.

114 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Turkmenistan', UNDP, New York, 2019.

115 See: SDG Integration Acceleration Toolkit: Knowledge Bank | SDG Integration (undp.org); Spark Blue Systems Capabilities.

116 Such as people living in slums, who also belong to broader geographic categories.

117 This is especially common among outputs targeting people vulnerable to shocks and fragility. For example, people affected by violence or armed conflict were tagged by 80 percent of outputs targeting refugees and 87 percent of outputs targeting IDPs.

generate qualitative examples of results achieved through such initiatives, such as empowerment of indigenous women supported through the creation of an Advisory Committee of Indigenous Women in Panama[118] or older and younger Roma women standing for local elections in Moldova following capacity development.[119] Intersections with 'women' and 'youth' were found for all Signature Solutions, e.g., for outputs targeting people living with HIV, tuberculosis or malaria[120] or unemployed people.[121]

The recent United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities/UN-Women publication "Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An intersectional approach to Leave No One Behind"[122] sets out eight enablers for intersectionality (*see Table 3*). While some of them are implicitly used in UNDP, no efforts were made to date to integrate them with the five-factor framework and UNDP programme and operations policies and procedures manual and turn them into tangible programme guidance.

TABLE 3. Intersectionality enablers as per "Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An intersectional approach to Leave No One Behind"

Issue	Actions
Reflexivity	Recognize limitations and that your perspective is only one reality.
Dignity, choice and autonomy	Create safe and accessible spaces for all to participate equally, including separate spaces if necessary.
Accessibility and universal design	Information and feedback mechanisms are provided in a range of accessible formats, including local languages.
Diverse knowledges	Define and design programme objectives and activities collaboratively with people with experience of intersectional discrimination. Local staff are diverse, and the programme undertakes a proactive approach to inclusive recruitment.
Intersecting identities	Process, output and outcome indicators use qualitative and quantitative approaches to measure progress towards equality for the most marginalized.
Relational power	Activities challenge attitudes, sitgma, stereotypes and discrimination faced by the most marginalized.
Time and space	Flexible and regular monitoring systems that can analyse the influence of external factors.
Transformative / rights-based	Adopt specific measures to address equality and non-discrimination and promote the participation and empowerment of the most marginalized.

Source: UN Women, 'Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An intersectional approach to Leave No One Behind', UN Women 2021, page 17.

[118] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office: 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Panama', UNDP, New York, 2019.

[119] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office: 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Moldova', UNDP, New York, 2022.

[120] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office: 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Zambia', UNDP, New York, 2020; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office: 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Tajikistan', UNDP 2019; UNDP independent evaluation, Cuba.

[121] UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP Support for Youth Economic Empowerment. 42 percent of outputs targeting unemployed people also tagged youth and 44 percent targeted women.

[122] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 'Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An intersectional approach to Leave No One Behind', UN Women, New York, 2021.

Integrating intersectionality into UNDP programming more effectively still requires a shift in mindset. Intersectionality is linked with constructivism, reflexivity, a deep analysis of power, and processes of differentiation and accounting for resistance/resilience – tenets not usually part of mainstream development cooperation, which is driven by positivist thinking. As noted by Hankivsky et al., "Applying intersectionality in the context of policy can … be considered a political action, as it demonstrates a commitment to ameliorating inequitable relations of power that maintain inequity – relations that often remain unquestioned in dominant policy approaches."[123]

3.4 Engagement with non-governmental actors

Finding 5 – Civil society and private sector engagement: While UNDP capacity to bring diverse stakeholders together is widely recognized, this has not been fully leveraged to systematically engage non-governmental actors on LNOB and RFBF. UNDP often relies on civil society for service delivery to those furthest behind and on the private sector as donors, but engages them much less in monitoring of public policy implementation and in hyperlocal, longer-term and more participatory partnerships.

While suggesting there is space for improvement,[124] evaluative evidence recognizes UNDP capacity to bring together stakeholders at various levels, including government counterparts, international actors, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector.[125] UNDP has successfully leveraged its convening power to promote dialogue, discuss development priorities and challenges, engage in advocacy, identify synergies, find new development solutions and mobilize resources. While examples of engagement around LNOB and RFBF issues exist, they often involve no more than one partner at a time and are fragmented across themes and localities.

The UNDP Private Sector Strategy, 2018-2022 indicates that it aims to make markets work for the SDGs, with a specific emphasis on the inclusion of poor and marginalized communities.[126] Triangulated evidence from past evaluations suggests that engagement with private sector actors could increase the extent and efficiency of the support provided by UNDP to those left behind. However, this potential has yet to be fully realized.

Recent initiatives originating in the Asia Pacific region, such as the Business and Human Rights initiative (B+Human Resources) and FairBiz, which are focused on advocacy and expanding UNDP engagement with the private sector (beyond traditional resource mobilization), are showing promising early results. Recognizing the key role of the private sector in development financing, the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 sets a bold 'moonshot' of promoting the investment and alignment of $1 trillion in public expenditure and private capital to the SDGs.[127]

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123 Hankivsky, Olena, et al., 'An Intersectionality-based Policy Analysis Framework: Critical reflections on a methodology for advancing equity', *International Journal for Equity in Health*, vol. 13, No. 119, 2014.

124 Past independent country programme evaluations show: uneven collaboration with other UN entities, competition between humanitarian and development actors on the HDP nexus, limited focus by UNDP on political advocacy vis-à-vis the government, etc.. See UNDP independent evaluations for South Sudan, CAR, Moldova and Nigeria.

125 For instance: UNDP independent evaluations for Nepal, Honduras, Ecuador, Egypt, Nigeria, Moldova.

126 UNDP, 'Private Sector Development and Partnership Strategy: Making markets work for the SDGs', UNDP, New York, 2020.

127 However, as the COVID finance recovery evaluation indicates, there is no clear roadmap yet on how to achieve this. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Financing the Recovery: A formative evaluation of UNDP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and SDG financing', UNDP, New York, 2022.

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and the informal market have the potential to reach segments of society where government may be less present.[128] UNDP has been increasingly working with MSMEs to build their resilience and improve the sustainability of local communities, including those left behind or at risk of being left behind. Post-pandemic MSME support projects were implemented in all regions of operation, from cash-for-work projects to capacity-building and the revamping of value chains.[129] In addition, the UNDP Business Call to Action (BCtA) initiative is a collective effort to improve the lives of people in low- and middle-income markets and reimagine their role in contributing to the SDGs. This includes a focus on inclusive business[130] that intentionally engages "the base of the economic pyramid". Members of the BCtA initiative are not only required to engage "low-income people in core business" but have also to be "commercially viable", with "replicable models" and committed to "advancing the SDGs". While this approach has the potential to scale up the organization's inclusive growth programming and improve the livelihoods of many, its beneficiaries can be considered more 'privileged' than those left furthest behind, since the latter are often excluded from the formal labour market. Initiatives such as the SDG value chain platform in Latin America and the Caribbean specifically address informal MSMEs.[131]

UNDP has recently launched a host of initiatives related to the informal economy. Through its Informal Economy Facility,[132] UNDP aims to work alongside actors in the informal economy to improve their resilience, with LNOB and RFBF at the core of this recent initiative. Ongoing LNOB-focused pilots include: support to the development of an integrated social protection database for informal workers in the Philippines; sectoral assessments of agriculture and textile industries in Central Asia to provide evidence on labour rights and the various barriers preventing access of the most marginalized groups to formal contracts; and seed funding in Jordan to support refugee-led businesses.[133]

UNDP has collaborated with CSOs for service delivery to people left behind or at risk of being left behind in many projects. Non-governmental implementing partners have particularly aided UNDP in expanding geographical coverage, reaching areas where services are limited or not available, and in expanding access to services for populations for whom access through official means is difficult or may create risk.[134] At the same time, triangulated evidence shows that most non-governmental partnerships relevant to LNOB and RFBF – irrespective of type of partner and despite programmatic guidance to the contrary – are project-based and short-term and have limited participation of partners in the design and development of initiatives, as well as in the measurement of results.[135]

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128 International Labour Organization, 'Informal Economy', website, accessed August 2022. "The informal economy comprises more than half of the global labour force and more than 90 percent of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) worldwide". For instance, in Latin America, "SMEs represent 99 percent of enterprises in total" (See 'ICSB Global Education Report, 2021').

129 Numerous examples were identified in Viet Nam, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Nepal, Tajikistan and Ukraine, among others.

130 "Inclusive businesses provide goods, services, and livelihoods on a commercially viable basis, either at scale or scalable, to people from the base of the economic pyramid (BOP) making them part of the value chain of companies´ core business as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers." G20 Development Working Group, 'Inclusive Business', March 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 'Inclusive Business Features', UNDP, New York, 2021.

131 80 percent of the MSMEs that benefit from the programme are informal, and the majority are owned by women. The intent is socio-economic inclusion, allowing the most vulnerable to have better livelihoods and jobs. Triangulated evaluative evidence on results was not available.

132 The IEF is part of the UNDP strategic offer on poverty and provides tools, data, knowledge and resources to support UNDP country office work on protecting and empowering informal economy actors (workers and businesses, particularly women and youth informal workers and women/youth led informal MSMEs).

133 United Nations Development Programme, 'Setting Out on a Journey to Destigmatize and Learn From Jordan's Informal Economy', blog, UNDP, 2022. More details on the Jordan pilot case and sensemaking exercise can be found in chapter 5.

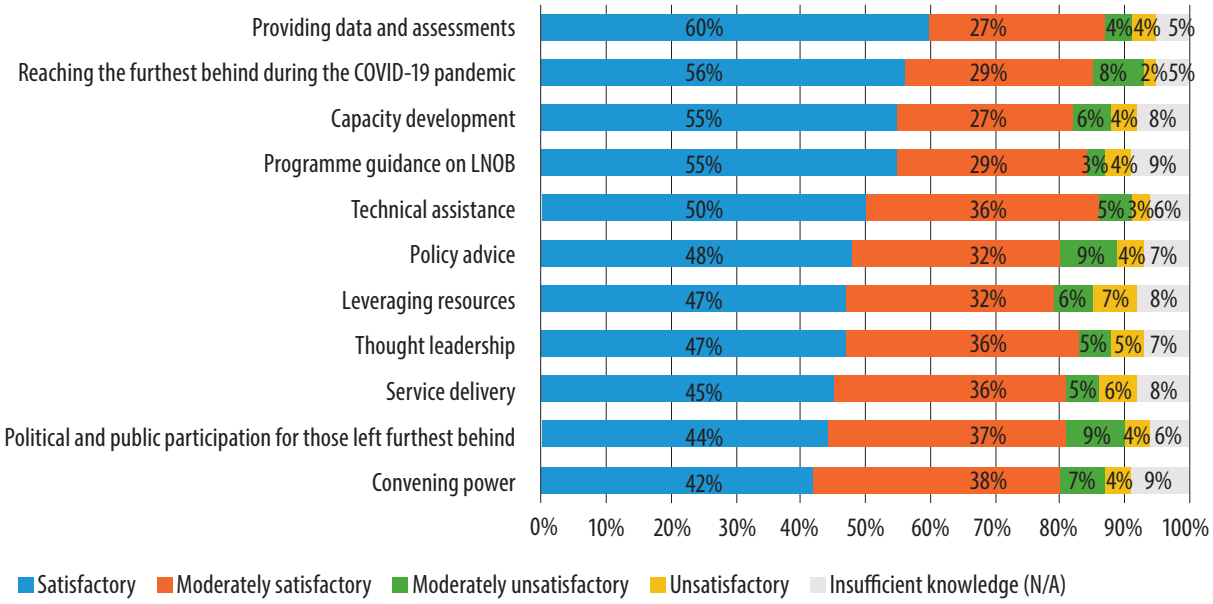
134 For example, in Timor Leste, a Civil Society Organization (CSO) partner organized extensive sub-district events to raise awareness about judicial processes and provided people who could not travel to a court the opportunity to register a case. People in remote areas also received initial mediation from CSO staff. United Nations Development Programme, 'Final Evaluation Report, JSP IV', UNDP, Dili, 2020.

135 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, Civil Society Engagement in LNOB.

Civil society is an important partner in the LNOB and RFBF agenda, as both a duty-bearer and a rights-holder. Besides service delivery to those left behind (as duty-bearer), CSOs can motivate civic engagement, defend and advocate for citizen rights, uphold or change social norms, and hold government accountable (as rights-holder).[136] Where UNDP helped develop the advocacy capacities of civil society (non-governmental organizations, experts and the media), civic engagement and government accountability typically increased, e.g., through engagement of local populations in district and sub-district development planning and by mobilizing collective inputs to proposed government policy, often with tangible results for the most left behind populations.[137]

The survey conducted as part of this evaluation found that UNDP support to CSOs was highly rated (see Figure 6). Moreover, about 80 percent of respondents perceived UNDP as a key partner on LNOB issues.[138] The value of local community organizations has been recognized by UNDP, particularly through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme, and is expected to gain further prominence through the organization's upcoming Local Action Offer,[139] which clarifies and updates the UNDP approach at hyperlocal level.

FIGURE 6. UNDP support is rated by CSOs to be of high quality



Source: IEO developed based on CSO Survey

[136] For instance: United Nations Development Programme, 'Evaluation of Strengthening the Rule of law and Human Rights Protection System in Nepal', UNDP, Kathmandu, 2015; United Nations Development Programme, 'Outcome Evaluation in Civic Engagement', UNDP, Almaty, 2015; United Nations Development Programme, 'Final Evaluation of the Programme "Strengthening Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for Responsive and Accountable Governance in Rwanda"', UNDP, Kigali, 2017; United Nations Development Programme, 'Rule of Law and Access to Justice Programme Evaluation, Final Evaluation Report', UNDP, Freetown, 2019.

[137] United Nations Development Programme, 'External Evaluation Report Project: "Strengthening the role of local communities/ Mjesne Zajednice in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015-2019', UNDP, Sarajevo, 2019; United Nations Development Programme, 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Amkeni Wakenya Project 2015-2020', UNDP, Nairobi, 2021.

[138] As Figure 6 shows, UNDP was perceived to provide quality support across its range of services, especially in providing data and assessments (59 percent CSO respondents assessed it as "satisfactory"), reaching the furthest behind during the COVID-19 pandemic and programme guidance on LNOB (56 percent and 55 percent "satisfactory" responses). Question wording may have introduced a slight positive bias, as it was phrased in the affirmative.

[139] United Nations Development Programme, 'BPPS Service Offer: Local Action', Draft, UNDP, 11 March 2022. Local Action is a new initiative which will build on the extensive and tested operational experience, national presence, and organizational framework of the Small Grants Programme (SGP) as well as other UNDP local initiatives. It focuses on three solutions: 1) indigenous peoples and local communities and CSOs; 2) resilience; and 3) investment.

Roundtable participants called on UNDP to amplify efforts for embedded and applied capacity-building of non-governmental actors, including local CSOs, on LNOB principles, advocacy and results-based management. Another salient demand from CSOs was for UNDP to utilize its strong position and government trust to promote the LNOB agenda, supporting CSO voices so they can be heard.[140] Similar arguments were made by private sector representatives. The prevailing view is that UNDP insufficiently leverages its partnerships with authorities to bring non-governmental actors to the table when LNOB issues are discussed. The counter-argument (triangulated by evidence) to justify this limited engagement is that non-governmental actors may come with weak accountability systems and ethical challenges of their own.[141] Those need to be pre-emptively flagged and addressed, and UNDP is considered by many to be more diligent than other agencies in this respect, to the point of significantly limiting the expansion of work, in particular with the private sector.[142]

One key challenge UNDP faces at this level is elite capture. Evaluations from Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Central African Republic (CAR), for example, reported dissatisfaction among local communities with UNDP engagement because it allegedly favoured and benefitted dominant individuals and groups, thereby overlooking promising linkages with community actors who could have effective entry points to LNOB issues.[143] Additionally, UNDP procurement processes tend to attract and select CSOs with the ability to navigate the bureaucratic process, which favours larger, more professionalized organizations rather than small grassroots structures, which typically lack the resources to be aware of, apply and be selected through United Nations tendering processes. The harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) itself excludes new and small CSOs and pushes UNDP to well-established partners. UNDP often faces a trade-off between continuing its longstanding relationships – inherently prone to path dependency and elite capture – or engaging with new partners who may better represent left-behind populations but potentially lack the capacities to work with the system and comply with the accountability requirements of the organization.

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[140] Some quotes from the open questions to the survey include: "Use its convening role to support civil society organizations engage with the Ministry of Statistics and Planning … to promote community generated data on LNOB communities to make SDGs implementation more inclusive"; "Involving CSOs into the communication and planning sessions with national level stakeholders (joint platform)"; "Technical strengthening of dialogue roundtables with the business sector".

[141] For instance, in digitalization projects with private sector partners, codes of conduct – in particular regarding data and privacy issues – needed to be imposed to protect marginalized groups. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'UNDP Support to Digitalization in Crisis Countries', UNDP, New York, 2021.

[142] Ibid.

[143] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, Civil Society Engagement in LNOB; United Nations Development Programme, 'Terminal Evaluation Report for the Project "Enhancing Wildlife Conservation in the Productive Southern Rangelands through a Landscape Approach"', UNDP, Nairobi, 2022; United Nations Development Programme: 'Scaling Up Adaptation in Zimbabwe with a Focus on Rural Livelihoods, Terminal Evaluation', UNDP, Harare, 2019.

Chapter 4.

ASSESSMENT OF UNDP INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN INTEGRATING LNOB

This chapter on institutional effectiveness examines how UNDP integrates LNOB into its programming and operations. It answers the evaluation questions related to coherence of the UNDP approach and the extent to which UNDP efficiently used scarce resources for integrating LNOB. It assesses the conceptual clarity and coherence around LNOB and RFBF in UNDP, including in relation to prioritization and intersectionality and the operationalization of the LNOB and RFBF concepts in guidance, processes and tools. The section also reviews the mechanisms in place for promoting LNOB and RFBF, the resources (human and financial) invested in integrating the principles, and the organization's ability to capture results on LNOB and RFBF.

4.1 Clear understanding: Conceptualization and guidance

Finding 6 – Commitment, clarity and prioritization: While the strategic plan strongly noted UNDP commitment to LNOB, overall strategies, guidance and tools have varied in their attention and in conceptual clarity. Focus on reaching the furthest behind first is particularly limited in programme implementation. Criteria for prioritization of specific populations have been unclear and the intersectional approach inconsistently applied due to limited guidance, lack of data and unwelcoming political environments.

The UNDP commitment to LNOB is clear from strategic planning documents, and from all HQ and regional office interviews conducted. The 2018-2021 SP noted the organization's commitment, as part of an inter-agency initiative, and the 2022-2025 SP positions LNOB as a high-level direction of change, giving further importance to the principle. It is helpful to make LNOB so prominent in the SP, yet having it in the document does not necessarily guarantee organizational focus and allocation of resources (as we have seen with gender equality when it was made into a Signature Solution). The commitment at country level varies widely, ranging from strong commitment to some country offices merely viewing it as a communication tool. In some crisis contexts, respondents highlighted the need for a stronger commitment to institutional strengthening over specifically serving the populations most left behind, including in cases where LNOB may not be government priority.

At the HQ and regional levels, there is some common understanding of LNOB as addressing structures that cause marginalization and poverty, using a rights-based approach.[144] Nevertheless, triangulated consultations indicate greater variation of interpretation of LNOB at country level, suggesting that

[144] The comparative analysis of other organizations found that all organizations recognized the importance of LNOB but, as with UNDP, there was a gap between conceptualization and operationalization. For example, UNICEF has taken a transformational, intersectional approach to tackling inequality and discrimination, underlining non-discrimination, equity and inclusion as core guiding principles. The European Commission, meanwhile, has conceptualized the LNOB principle as being part of the HRBA.

in most contexts, LNOB is understood as targeting particular groups (as opposed to taking a rights-based approach). There are some conceptual tensions between LNOB and the HRBA, with the LNOB principle being based on political commitment by national governments, whereas human rights are based on the legal obligation of Member States. Nevertheless, legal obligations and political commitments are not necessarily contradictory elements and may in fact be complementary.[145]

In the two strategic plans and some regional programme documents, those left behind are conceptualized normatively as passive and vulnerable recipients of assistance, a characterization confirmed by interviews. This is in stark contrast to the agency's 'capability' approach,[146] which focuses on human agency, and which was mostly evident in the Human Development Reports.

The organization's strategies tend to over-use the catch-all term "vulnerable groups". This is problematic because it risks conceptualizing those left behind as passive recipients of development assistance, rather than potentially active participants in the making of their societies. Using the term "vulnerable" shifts the focus on programming to "targeting", rather than building on the existing capabilities of those left behind and ensuring their participation and engagement. Use of similar terms was also visible in the COVID-19 strategy. The COVID-19 integrated response strategy 1.0[147] did not include a systematic LNOB focus, and did not tend to disaggregate population groups, focusing on "vulnerable and marginalized" populations and gender. The subsequent COVID-19 2.0 strategy[148] focused on gender equality and inequality, but does not refer specifically to LNOB and RFBF, instead referring to marginalized groups.[149]

The main UNDP guidance for integrating LNOB and RFBF, the 2018 discussion paper,[150] is conceptually strong, with useful analysis of intersecting factors determining exclusion. The five key factors – discrimination, geography, governance, socio-economic status and shocks and fragility – are a helpful framework for conceptualizing why some people and groups are left behind. The five key factors were also used as a central plank of the Sustainable Development Group LNOB guidance.[151] However, there is nothing in the framework that links it to a conception of individual agency or autonomy, or the capability approach. Similarly, there is no particular link to the HRBA. UNDP staff noted that there was insufficient and unclear guidance on how to practically apply LNOB, in particular in relation to working in challenging political and socio-cultural settings.

UNDP guidance for country-level planning and reporting,[152] until the 2021 cycle, did not give adequate direction on integrating LNOB. It included references to multidimensional poverty, gender equality and stakeholder engagement, but not an explicit LNOB focus. The revised 2022 CPD guidance is a clear

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145 The UN Sustainable Development Group LNOB Operational Guidelines explain very clearly the differences and complementarities between HRBA and LNOB and should be used in an integrated manner that could help UNDP in being more clear, articulate and appropriate in terms of conceptualization. See UNDSG: 'Operationalizing Leaving No One Behind. Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams', UNSDG 2022.

146 Sen, Amartya, 'Equality of What?' in S. McMurrin, ed., *Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Volume 1*, Cambridge University Press, 1980; reprinted in John Rawls et al.: *Liberty, Equality and Law*, Cambridge University Press, 1987; Sen, Amartya, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press 1999; Sen, Amartya, *The Idea of Justice*, Penguin Books 2010.

147 United Nations Development Programme, 'COVID-19: UNDP's Integrated Response', UNDP, New York, 2020.

148 UNDP, 'Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030'.

149 In the Arab region, for instance, the UNDP response to COVID-19 (through the Social and Economic Impact Assessments, and socio-economic response plan, Socio-Economic Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic) has been reviewed from an HRBA and gender perspective, displaying organizational commitment to LNOB elements. See: Review of the UNDP COVID-19 response in the Arab States.

150 UNDP, 'What Does It Mean to Leave No One Behind'.

151 UNSDG, 'Operationalizing Leave No one Behind'.

152 United Nations Development Programme, 'CPD Revised Template and Guidance, v.3', UNDP, New York, 2019.

improvement, which suggests an analysis of groups left furthest behind and the UNDP contribution, but it does not emphasize reaching the furthest behind first through programming or acknowledge the intersecting factors that may lead to certain populations being left behind. The programme and operations policies and procedures[153] manual is mainly a technical document elucidating the steps in the preferred programme cycle, with no LNOB references. The ROAR guidance also mainly focuses on following adequate results-based management (RBM) principles and does not adequately support reporting on which left behind populations were targeted and why. The SPs and various guidance documents include lists of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, with generally non-disaggregated categories of "women", "persons with disabilities" and "youth" being the most prominent, without a clear rationale as to why these should be prioritized or how they intersect.

In contrast, the guidance on social and environmental standards (SES) has LNOB as the first overarching principle. The SES guidance emphasizes the importance of RFBF: "As an overarching programming principle, leaving no one behind requires UNDP to prioritize its programmatic interventions to address the situation of those most marginalized, discriminated [against] and excluded, and to empower them as active agents of the development process".[154] However, the supporting documents do not detail how to ensure the standards are met when environments are challenging. For example, the standard on indigenous peoples does not include guidance on how to navigate situations where their rights are being denied by governments, or how to deal with conflict within indigenous communities. The SES guidance note on stakeholder engagement[155] includes only a short generic piece on engagement in challenging environments. The SES, much like the LNOB discussion paper, lacks practical examples.[156] About half the guidance reviewed by the evaluation team had a gender focus, but there was limited focus on other populations likely to be left behind.

Reaching the furthest behind first is a challenge. The principle was found to be either missing from programme design and planning documents or included as an afterthought, and neglected in monitoring and evaluation. There were some scattered good practices, for example work with Roma populations in Eastern Europe, but overall, there appeared to be scant attention paid to supporting those furthest behind. Yet given the political commitment to RFBF, this should be a strong focus of UNDP work. An important illustrative comparison is the 2018 LNOB guidance of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which integrates RFBF and quotes the Swiss constitution (p.3): "the strength of a people is measured by the well-being of its weakest members".

At the programme design stage, carrying out a detailed analysis of the structural causes of marginalization and the complexities of power dynamics, including through consultation with likely left-behind populations, and translating this into programming, is given insufficient attention. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is one of the tools for conducting such analyses, but it is not widely used by country offices, as evidenced in the ROARs reviewed.[157] Additionally, the focus of the MPI is on socio-economic status and geographical disparities, which needs to be complemented with other tools that better help

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153 United Nations Development Programme, 'Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures', (website, accessed 2022).

154 United Nations Development Programme, 'Social and Environmental Standards', UNDP, New York, 2021.

155 United Nations Development Programme, 'SES Guidance Note on Stakeholder Engagement', UNDP, New York, 2020.

156 GIZ has developed a number of tools to guide the programme teams in integrating the LNOB principle. Toolkits such as the LNOB Tree4Options and the checklist of key questions on LNOB relevance have been proving particularly useful to the country teams during project design and implementation stages.

157 Out of the 15 sample countries, none referred to the MPI in their ROAR in 2018. Two referred to it in 2019, three in 2020 and four in 2021. All references were to national MPIs (most often in the context of creation / updating of the tool). In one instance, the ROAR mentioned usage of the global MPI in addition. Only one of the countries referred to the MPI in its CPD for the evaluated period. Low level of usage of the tool was also confirmed by key informant interviews.

identify other factors of discrimination and marginalization.[158] The Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessment concurs: "While UNDP has an earnest commitment to the LNOB agenda, its analysis of the drivers of marginalization, and its ability to monitor how its interventions reach the most vulnerable, leaves room for improvement".[159]

While UNDP has tools to identify who is left behind (socio-economic survey data, MPI methodology, etc.), it does not have an adequate mechanism at country level for prioritizing among the various populations in need of support. Key choices that country-level staff need support with are: first, whether to focus on specific 'pockets' of multiple deprivation or target the most sizeable left-behind group within the country (depth or breadth issue). Second, to what extent to opportunistically use entry points where political will exists to improve the livelihoods of some of the furthest behind groups vs. advocacy to advance the inclusion and rights of all left-behind groups (normative issue). Third, to what extent availability of funding or partner availability and capacity should be a determining factor. Other entities have provided clear guidance in this regard. For instance, UNFPA has created a prioritization tool and requires its country offices to employ a "gender+" approach, targeting gender in addition to one intersection.[160] In addition to challenges such as lack of data, sensitivities related to collection and analysis of LNOB data in places where certain groups may be discriminated against and in situations where government legislation is at odds with internationally-agreed conventions (such as, for example, where homosexuality is criminalized) hinder adequate clarification and prioritization.

It is relevant to note that two key population groups, indigenous peoples and LGBTQI+ persons, are not included in the UNDP SP, despite the general recognition that in many contexts these population groups are the furthest behind, and that there is a United Nations Declaration and 2020 CEB statement covering the former.[161] In conflict contexts, other groups, particularly the elderly and persons with disabilities, tended to be most overlooked; in governance initiatives, refugees and migrants were least included in project design. Interviews indicated that more explicit corporate commitment to work with these populations would be welcome by country offices.

LNOB is embedded within the organization's existing operational frameworks for humanitarian action and some populations, such as women, youth and refugees, are prioritized at the onset of interventions due to strategic considerations and/or donor interest. This results in some groups being more served and captured in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) metrics than others. For example, in Jordan, there was limited disaggregation beyond women, youth, and refugee and host communities, and limited attention was paid to those affected by socio-economic status or discrimination, which could lend itself to a more intersectional approach.

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158 It should be noted that UNDP is planning to develop a new integrated MPI tool for the local level that will consider "other factors" of exclusion. In addition to the standard MPI methodology, it will be expected to apply participatory qualitative research approaches to try to capture subjective assessments of poverty and exclusion.

159 Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, 'MOPAN Assessment Report, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2020 Assessment Cycle', MOPAN, Paris, 2021, p.125.

160 UNFPA has listed prioritization criteria at the global, regional and country levels in its LNOB operational plan. The UNFPA "gender+" is a term that encompasses overlapping, intersecting disadvantages that need to be identified and addressed and is a way of saying that an additional step needs to be taken to assess whether a person's gender + another factor leaves them furthest behind. The agency's eight global furthest-behind factors include: age; culture, ethnicity, race, language and religion; disability; HIV and AIDS status; location, migration, asylum and displacement; sexual orientation and gender identity; and income/wealth. There is some overlap here with the five factors in the UNDP LNOB discussion paper.

161 United Nations: 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples', General Assembly Resolution A/61/L.67, United Nations, New York, 12 September 2007; United Nations, 'Indigenous Peoples', UNSCEB, (website, accessed 2022).

4.2 Organizational structure

Finding 7 – Organizational structure: Different parts of UNDP are integrating LNOB principles through informal mechanisms. Yet having LNOB communicated as everyone's responsibility has diluted accountability, and limited coordination and incentives for LNOB.

To date, integration of LNOB into UNDP work has been driven by individual champions and limited to standalone activities. While the organization has benefitted from a motivated staff and informal support mechanisms at the regional and country levels, formal functions that might be expected to be in place to promote and coordinate a cross-cutting theme – such as work plans, budgets, focal points, incentive and accountability structures, networks and a community of practice for LNOB and RFBF – were found to be absent in UNDP. The absence of an organized network means that there is likely a lack of systematic learning shared across contexts and countries. This would incur significant costs in terms of staff time, e.g., in running a network or community of practice, or being a focal point. These focal point roles often go to junior staff, who, while usually very committed, do not have a major role or influence on decision-making, and lead to the 'function' becoming the responsibility of these focal points only, rather than being adequately mainstreamed.

Despite multiple events and discussions with some focus on LNOB, and availability of some relevant publications on solutions for integrating those left behind, evidence suggests that the Global Policy Network (GPN)[162] was overall not effective in systematic and reliable experience- and knowledge-sharing on LNOB. Various communities of practice, HQ and Regional Bureaux sections and individuals took the lead in different contexts, with no organizational coherence, systemic approach or clear linkage with the country offices. For example, CO staff often indicated not knowing who to get in touch with at HQ in relation to LNOB, alongside a clear gap in explicit expertise or reference points at regional levels and very few focal points at CO level. COs also mostly lacked practical resources for integrating LNOB and RFBF. The approach might be considered 'letting a thousand flowers bloom', but while some have bloomed in an *ad hoc* way, others would have benefitted from a better structure.

During the UNDP organizational restructuring in 2018-2019, there was discussion of establishing a dedicated LNOB unit.[163] However, resources were not available, and work related to LNOB was integrated into the Signature Solutions, in particular poverty eradication (now poverty and inequality, Signature Solution 1). At the HQ level, the inclusive growth team is still considered by most to be the informal lead, while at regional level, different Signature Solutions took the lead. Interview respondents differed in their opinion as to whether there should be a specific focal unit leading on LNOB, such as the SDG integration or the inclusive growth team.[164] Relying on integration of this cross-cutting priority without a coordinating role has led to a situation where it is 'everyone and no-one's business'.

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[162] The UNDP Global Policy Network (GPN) is a network of global experts and practitioners, from local to global.

[163] Interview respondents shared an undated and untitled PowerPoint presentation from around the end of 2018 which corroborates the information.

[164] The analysis of comparable organizations found that none of the organizations have an organizational LNOB unit. UNFPA has an LNOB task force/reference group, and GIZ has LNOB focal points. UNFPA subsequently developed an operational plan for 2022-2025 with a focus on reaching the furthest behind. See United Nations Population Fund, 'Assessment of UNFPA Performance in Addressing the Principle of Leaving No One Behind as Part of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021', UNFPA, New York, 2020.

In terms of the organization's operations, there is scope for UNDP to move away from its current tendency to take a siloed approach, both through greater integration between the Signature Solutions and moving to a portfolio approach that requires "transitioning away from solutions that compartmentalize policy areas towards system thinking that eliminates siloed approaches".[165] However, there is limited evidence to suggest that the move to the portfolio approach has adequately considered how best to integrate LNOB and RFBF principles.

Lack of consistent messaging from senior managers was highlighted as a key constraint. Despite the prominence given to LNOB in the SP, there was little evidence of senior managers consistently reinforcing the importance of integrating LNOB across UNDP programming. For example, a review of ten randomly selected webinar presentations and speeches by the UNDP Administrator for the 2019-2022 period[166] found that only one included a reference to LNOB, in relation to digital inclusion.[167]

The United Nations system has introduced a number of accountability frameworks on different thematic topics over the last ten years, such as the gender equality SWAP and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. Interview participants indicated that human rights and LGBTQI+ accountability mechanisms are in the process of being developed. These provide a strong basis for greater accountability within UNDP around LNOB. The need for stronger senior manager leadership on LNOB and RFBF, along with a culture of participation and creativity, was considered key to LNOB integration.

4.3 Resources to match ambitions (human/financial)

Finding 8 – LNOB human and financial resources: UNDP systems make it difficult to credibly assess the resources dedicated to LNOB integration. Mobilizing and allocating adequate financial and human resources for LNOB integration is a challenge, particularly due to the donor- and government- driven, projectized nature of UNDP work.

While the LNOB marker indicates that most UNDP work includes some LNOB orientation, there are many challenges with the accuracy of the data, including whether all the projects so marked can be considered part of LNOB integration. Another interpretation would be that UNDP senior leaders consider resources prioritized for the least development countries (LDCs) to count as LNOB integration. However, devoting resources to less developed countries does not necessarily translate into reaching the furthest behind in those countries, nor does it acknowledge the LNOB challenges in other development contexts. While socio-economic status is a very important factor in the five-factor framework, there are four others to be considered. Furthermore, there are nearly 500 million people living below the poverty line in middle-income countries,[168] while middle-income countries receive only 16 percent of UNDP core

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165 United Nations Development Programme, 'Repositioning of the United Nations Development System: Progress Update on Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279', paper presented to UNDP Executive Board Annual Session 2021, UNDP, New York, p.4.

166 See the speeches reviewed: 2021 SDG Business forum; mine action day 2022; international volunteer day 2021; World Economic Forum 2022; international day for eradication or poverty, 2020; Administrator on the UN Secretary-General's report on debt and COVID-19; 2022; Keynote Fintech week 2022; Address to UNHRC, 2022; SEforAll forum, 2022.

167 World Economic Forum, 'Achim Steiner of UNDP on Empathy, Tech Policy and the 'Power of One'', WEForum 2022.

168 According to the World Bank's Data Bank, there were 414.1 million people living under the poverty line of $1.90/day in lower-middle-income countries and 34.5 million people in this category living in upper-middle-income countries in 2018. (Accessed 2022).

resources[169] (*see Figure 7*). This is not to discount the importance of spending on LDCs. However, it does suggest a need to re-think the UNDP formula for allocating core resources, which is income-based and focused on low-income countries (a category which overlaps significantly with the LDC category).[170]

FIGURE 7. Percentage of core expenditures dedicated to countries according to their income typology (2018-2022)

Source: PowerBI Financial Dashboard, data for 2018-2022, accessed July 2022

Other challenges to LNOB integration include UNDP reliance on donor funding and government cost sharing, which is often short-term and earmarked. During the 2018-2021 SP period, only 8.5 percent ($1.5 billion) of resources were 'core', meaning UNDP has flexibility in determining how to allocate such resources. Country offices noted that the donor-based project funding and the need to draft quick project proposals often resulted in limited time for conducting the gender and LNOB analysis required to inform adequate prioritization and to be able to operationalize an approach that addresses differential needs. In many cases, prioritization was decided by donors or national governments. The strategic plan's emphasis on a portfolio approach provides an opportunity for less projectized funding and more coherent integration of LNOB and RFBF thinking. This would however require engaging with donors differently, and the extent to which UNDP has been able to do that is unclear.

Additionally, there is no plan to strategically mobilize resources with LNOB in mind. There are two related challenges in this regard. First, UNDP has yet to convince donors of the benefit of investing in those left behind. Secondly, it has yet to clarify the specific key value added of UNDP in this arena. Triangulated evidence indicates there is some donor appetite for LNOB if UNDP can be clearer about its specific comparative advantage around LNOB and RFBF.

There are some avenues of funding that may be promising for strengthened LNOB integration. The United Nations has been raising money through a pooled funding mechanism to address the challenges of the projectized nature of funding and to promote more coordinated efforts between United Nations agencies. The administrators of the COVID-19 Multi-Party Trust Fund decided to build a strong gender lens into the second round of funding for the United Nations socio-economic response, taking into account a key left-behind population. The 2021 annual report of the fund states that 73 percent of 'second call' programmes scored the highest rating on the gender marker (in which gender is a main

[169] The total refers to all core resources in 2018-2022 dedicated to country offices, excluding HQ, regional bureaux and other categories.

[170] According to the LNOB assessment conducted by UNFPA, one of the challenges in translating the commitment to LNOB into practice was the "lack of funding or difficulty to raise funds for LNOB". Based on this assessment, the UNFPA Operational Plan, 2022-2025 now includes a mandate for supplementary resource allocation to COs based on a sliding scale linked to the level of inequality. The assessment also recommends rolling out quotas and specific targets in order to prioritize 'reaching the furthest behind' factors.

objective), and none fell below a score where gender equality is a significant aim.[171] In this particular case, the data so far indicate that better success was found through mainstreaming gender rather than targeting the specific needs of women and men through standalone funding windows. It must be noted that this information cannot be generalized, but mainstreaming LNOB through different funding mechanisms offers an alternative to trying to raise resources for individual LNOB 'groups' that may compete with one another.[172]

The challenge in ensuring adequate financial resources for LNOB has implications for staff capabilities. UNDP does not have systematic capacity mapping on LNOB, but triangulated evidence, including interviews with key managers, pointed to insufficient staff capacity to conduct adequate gender/LNOB analyses as well as to measure progress on results. As an illustration of the broader challenges, the gender specialists in each county office are often given the additional responsibility of LNOB integration. However, in terms of staff capacities, 63 percent of gender specialists had the staff designation of "other" (i.e., contractors who are not full staff members and who may lack equal team participation privileges), while 30 percent were part-time. Similarly, while UNDP has been hiring disability specialists over the past two years at the headquarters and regional bureaux, these tend to be short-terms contracts.

UNDP is building the capacity of the next generation of leaders, many of whom were promoted during the de-linking of the resident representative and resident coordinator roles, which represents a shift from the 'old guard'. Promising new trainings have been introduced on system-based transformation aimed at tackling the root causes of complex, interconnected development challenges and a "Leadership for Gender Equality Certificate" was launched which integrates the LNOB principle and an intersectional approach to gender equality. But it is too early to assess the extent to which these have been well disseminated and used by staff and partners or are contributing to better LNOB integration in UNDP programming and operations.

Finding 9 – Diversity in UNDP: UNDP has taken steps towards promoting non-discrimination, diversity, equality and inclusion in staffing. Despite progress, the degree of commitment varies at different levels across the organization and resource allocation does not yet match the commitment expressed in discourse.

The People for 2030 Strategy,[173] introduced in 2019, stated that "UNDP, as a values-driven organization, has an obligation to 'walk the talk' and ensure that UN values, including respect for diversity, are consistently lived by all our personnel".[174] To enable diversity and inclusion is a core behavioural competency for all staff. Diversity is not just a human rights issue; there is evidence to suggest that more organizational diversity helps spark organizational innovation, improve productivity and increase employee retention, and that it helps serve communities better.[175]

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171 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 'Early Lessons and Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF', UNSDG, New York, 2021.

172 For example, in 2019, UNDP established a funding window for gender, for flexible GEWE programming, which has received only $2.52 million in funding, making it the least well-resourced funding window. Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, accessed in May 2022.

173 United Nations Development Programme, 'People for 2030: UNDP's people strategy (2019-2021)', UNDP, New York, 2019.

174 Ibid, p.13.

175 Hunt, Vivian et al., 'Delivering Through Diversity', McKinsey and Company, 2018; Lorenzo, Rocio and Martin Reeves, 'How and Where Diversity Drives Financial Performance', Harvard Business Review, 2018; Rock, David and Heidi Grant, 'Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter', Harvard Business Review, 2018; Brown, Karen, 'To Retain Employees, Focus on Inclusion – Not Just Diversity', Harvard Business Review, 2018; Galinsky, Adam D. et al., 'Maximizing the Gains and Minimizing the Pains of Diversity: A policy perspective', *Perspectives of Psychological Science*, vol. 10, No. 6, pp.742-748.

UNDP is developing a new diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy, which aims to provide an overarching framework for UNDP work, including more targeted programmes related to gender and disability, accompanied by an oversight structure. In absolute numbers, UNDP has a three-person DEI team, with two P3 positions focusing on diversity and inclusion[176] managed by a P5 position in charge of a larger people performance portfolio. Among the sister agencies UNDP was compared to, UNICEF has a more well-resourced team on culture and diversity, made up of six dedicated staff.[177]

UNDP has also introduced a new graduate programme for high-potential young people from the Global South, focusing in particular on those who are the first in their families to graduate from a university, or who have a disability. The graduate programme won the 2021 Innovation in Recruitment Award at the International Organizations Career Development Roundtable. In total, 16 graduates representing different programme countries were selected for roles with UNDP. The UNDP-United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities provided employment opportunities with UNV, working with 33 young professionals with disabilities. The African Young Women Leaders (AYWL) Fellowship Programme was jointly implemented by UNDP and the African Union Commission to develop the next generation of young African women leaders.

UNDP has been successful in improving levels of parity in gender and North/South representation. In terms of creating an enabling environment, UNDP has also gone through a comprehensive review by the EDGE Certified Foundation[178] and been awarded the EDGE MOVE Seal (second level), meaning it is making progress and taking steps towards achieving high standards in relation to gender equality. The only other United Nations organization that achieved this certification is UNICEF. The certification noted that there is room for improvement in workplace flexibility and in terms of opportunities for advancement. UNDP is also placing more emphasis on improving access to workplaces and tools through the Reasonable Accommodation Guidelines for persons with a disability. A new funding facility was also put in place to enable accommodations for individual personnel, in addition to the fund for capital investments to ensure accessibility.

Notwithstanding these recent successes, in concrete numbers, there are very limited data in UNDP on the diversity of its staff, and on the level of agreement with the notion that diversity in the workplace enables better achievement of results.[179] Diversity without inclusion, in the sense of equal opportunity, is insufficient. UNDP only has systematic data on North/South and binary gender identities,[180] and is unable to capture the multiplicity of identities. The limited data available also highlight some gaps (s*ee Figure 8 below*). For example, HQ is skewed in favour of the North, including at the Office of Human Resources. Overall, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are the only regions close to parity, and Latin America the only region with lesser representation of men. Additionally,

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176 First position focusing on DEI and anti-racism and the second position focused on gender parity and disability.

177 The UNICEF team is part of the Executive Office and will be moving to a regional hub location to be closer to the people they serve. Team consists of the following: (1) D1 Principal Advisor (2) P5 Senior Advisor, DEI (3) P3 Data Specialist; (4) P4 Social and Behavioural Change Specialist; (5) P4 Disability Specialist and (6) P5 DEI Senior Advisor.

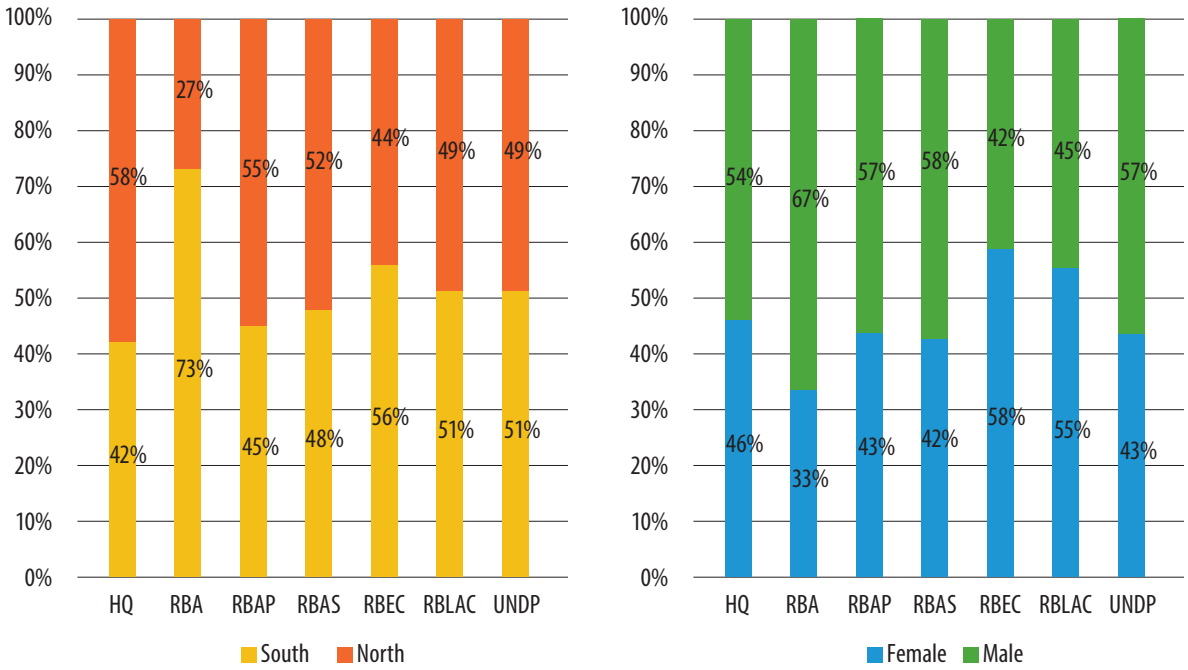
178 The foundation aims to measure, accelerate and certify gender and intersectional equity in workplace. Edge Certified Foundation (accessed 2022).

179 Data capture has been a challenge not only for UNDP but for other UN organizations as well, with issues around self-identification, trust and taxonomies for data. Nonetheless, there has been some movement. A first step taken by UNICEF, for example, is a policy on personal data protection, which provides staff with an opportunity to self-identify on some identities (LGBTQI+ and persons with disabilities). UNICEF is also conducting pilot studies on national staff diversity in some countries. The UN Secretariat is considering gender markers beyond the binary identities. UNFPA and UN Women are working on taxonomy for race-related data.

180 Gender parity is discussed in the next finding.

men are still overrepresented in countries with fragile settings, where there are only 34 percent women in the workforce and the same share at the senior level. While good practices in hiring more diversely have been shared by country offices, there is room for improved guidance.

FIGURE 8. South/North and gender distribution among P5 and higher staff positions (2021)



Source: PowerBI Corporate Dashboard – Executive snapshot, data for 31 December 2021, accessed July 2022
*RBA: Regional Bureau for Africa
RBAP: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
RBAS: Regional Bureau for Arab States
RBEC: Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
RBLAC: Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean

Increased global attention to racial injustice in 2020 was a catalyst for greater attention to systemic racism and its effects within UNDP, including in its operations.[181] An internal UNDP team has led a consultation process on racism in the workplace, supported by senior management. The taskforce made multiple recommendations in terms of dialogues, learning, staff management, organizational culture, policies, procedures and practices, and monitoring and accountability. The process has included multiple dialogues planned for 2022, including through the internal anti-racism and decoloniality network. But progress has been slow on anti-racism initiatives. According to the anti-racism task force response on progress with the taskforce recommendations,[182] UNDP has not adequately addressed the internal communications gap, including through a management response, to show progress on anti-racism.

A review of SparkBlue discussions also highlighted staff concerns regarding the lack of adequate communication of policies, measures and strategies on DEI. Discussants argued that UNDP has not been able to make a case for diversity to its personnel.

[181] Human Rights Council, '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Fight Against Racial Discrimination', HRC 2022, p.12.

[182] January 2022 reporting from the task force.

The formality and hierarchy of UNDP workplace culture have also been identified as key challenges in relation to creating an enabling environment for employees from diverse backgrounds. The current approach to creating an enabling environment, based on running a biennial global staff survey (GSS), is too infrequent to effectively monitor progress or observe what is happening in real-time, and has limited disaggregation of data to begin with. The second phase of the people strategy, implemented as of June 2022, identifies the need for a 'listening architecture' based on regular GSS and *ad hoc* (pulse) online measurement, monitoring and feedback mechanisms and tools that enable more systematic and deeper analysis of how people work and how they feel about work. Nonetheless, the 2020 GSS showed that women scored the organization less favourably than men in all the assessed areas.

4.4 LNOB and RFBF metrics and learning

Finding 10 – Systems transformation, measurement and learning for LNOB and RFBF: UNDP corporate planning, budgeting and monitoring systems have moved towards a greater degree of disaggregation of data by target population, which benefits an LNOB approach. At the same time, there has been little movement away from reporting for compliance with pre-determined results, and limited learning from integrated systems thinking approaches.

In the current integrated results and resources framework (IRRF), LNOB results are measured at the outcome level as the Strategic Plan direction of change, but reporting of progress based on the SDGs is not causally linked to UNDP contributions. There is a clearer focus on data disaggregation compared to the previous IRRF (2018-2021), and a commitment to monitor through a set of output indicators disaggregated by multiple variables including sex, age group, geographical location and socio-economic status, where relevant. Close to half the indicators use disaggregated data to monitor populations that UNDP works with. An attempt has also been made to measure the root causes of inequality, for example the proportion of time spent on care work. At the same time, many indicators have limited focus on results and reach/coverage.[183] UNDP, like other organizations, is also struggling with indicators that could capture intersectionality.

A review of ROARs from 2019 onwards found that most reports follow the SP in listing 'vulnerable' groups without explaining why specific groups have been prioritized or without covering intersectionality. In general, ROARs tend to aggregate left-behind groups (e.g., 'vulnerable', 'rural households'), have a limited LNOB focus through a single reporting question[184] and only occasionally make references to inequality, with some exceptions (e.g., Albania, Namibia). LNOB is usually considered a separate result, rather than being integrated throughout reporting – in part because of the structure of the ROAR.[185] As such, these reports do not currently facilitate a clear understanding of what UNDP is actually achieving vis-à-vis LNOB. Also missing is a focus on the analytical categories of equality, equity and non-discrimination, which are necessary in order to understand who is being left behind and why, and the extent to which UNDP programmes and operations are achieving results that address these dimensions.

[183] E.g., Indicators 1.4.1: Number of people who have access to HIV and related services and 2.2.3: Number and proportion of people supported who have access to justice. The indicators are limited to the opportunity to access, rather than focusing on the numbers that have accessed and benefitted.

[184] On designing the impact on beneficiaries and factors contributing to it.

[185] ROAR sections C.2.2.5.P and C.2.2.5.N. request information on LNOB specifically.

Identifying and reaching the furthest behind *within* population groups is a major challenge, as sufficiently granular data are often unavailable and/or costly to generate with accuracy and frequency. In some countries, this is complicated by legal limitations; for example, it may be illegal to collect data on religious affiliation, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

Further, it has proven challenging to demonstrate results in relation to UNDP advocacy for the use of data on discriminated against or marginalized populations for national budgeting and policymaking. The main reasons are a lack of proper documentation and the organization's desire to demonstrate national ownership of results and see governments credited, e.g., for passing new anti-discrimination legislation. From a results-based management perspective, a focus on crediting government may dilute the visibility of UNDP inputs and work counter to effective measurement of contribution, with potentially adverse implications for the organization's business case and resource mobilization. The use of innovative methodologies such as process tracing, as used in this evaluation (Finding 11 ff.) is an attempt to uncover the UNDP contribution despite this challenge.

Since 2018, UNDP country offices have been asked to report against an 'LNOB marker'. The introduction of the marker has helped to provide a basic understanding of UNDP programme targeting. As a one-time exercise during the planning process, it has to some extent made country offices consider the populations that they aim to work with. It has also served as a knowledge tool, helping country offices identify other UNDP programmes by target group. However, many programme managers interviewed were still unaware of the LNOB marker altogether, as these were usually assigned by M&E officers with limited consultation.

There is also inadequate understanding of the degree to which a project targets different groups, since there is no accompanying guidance to clarify. For example, participation of a certain group during project design would suffice as a marker 'tick'. And while the marker guidance suggests that the entries should represent an intersectional identity, there is little evidence to suggest that an intersectional lens was applied. The rationale behind 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") is also unclear.

A number of interview participants also noted that the current planning and monitoring system – where results are measured according to pre-determined and short-term indicators and fed into a reporting framework from country offices to regional offices to HQ, with limited iteration or feedback loops in the process – is not useful for capturing results in relation to complex changes in socio-economic and power dynamics, and structural causes of inequality and marginalization. The last SP evaluation noted as a challenge that many of these indicators receive a forced compliance response, which may promote over-reporting and not be conducive to organizational objectives and learning.[186] And while there is an organizational aim for systems thinking and more disaggregated data, it would also need to be meaningfully/strategically integrated into UNDP programmes and policy in a manner that such discrimination is effectively addressed. The UNDP Administrator recently spoke about the need to sweep away the "cobwebs of a 20th Century fiduciary culture", including a new approach to RBM that relates more directly to 21st Century development challenges, highlighting leadership awareness of these challenges.[187]

[186] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2022', UNDP, New York, 2021, p.23.

[187] United Nations Development Programme, 'Why "Strategic" Innovation -- The Challenge of Transformation', webinar, UNDP, New York, 21 March 2022.

There are particular limitations to the extent to which RBM data are used for learning. Triangulated evidence noted that there are no systematized efforts for evaluating, documenting and sharing good practices on how to reach left-behind populations. The current corporate and digital flows are inadequately focused on learning, which is recognized in the new UNDP knowledge management strategy.[188]

The 2021 MOPAN assessment also found that: "Corporate-level reporting on achievement against human rights and LNOB targets is limited, there is still a lack of disaggregated data to be able to meaningfully assess UNDP support to those most vulnerable, and a need to support country offices to assess and address the LNOB agenda".[189] The work done by the Accelerator Labs on ethnographic knowledge has begun this process. The labs are building a global database of development solutions crafted from the 'bottom up', often working with underrepresented groups and organizations, with a strong emphasis on ethnographic data and gathering and analysing local knowledge, as well as triangulating between meta-data sources (such as satellite data of population movements) and ethnographic data.[190] They have also been working on 'positive deviance',[191] analysing four development situations where actors have been successful in achieving results where other similar actors are failing.

[188] United Nations Development Programme, 'Reimagining Knowledge Management: Strategy and framework for action, 2022-2025', UNDP, New York, 2022.

[189] Op cit. pp. 49, 86.

[190] The analysis of comparable organizations found that the LNOB partnership model encourages, monitors and supports the collection, analysis and dissemination of community-driven data that helps in determining the local drivers of marginalization, also ensuring meaningful participation of left-behind groups.

[191] United Nations Development Programme, 'Data-Powered Positive Deviance for Sustainable Development', UNDP, New York, 2021.

Chapter 5.

PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE: UNDP contribution to 'leaving no one behind' and 'reaching the furthest behind first' by Signature Solution

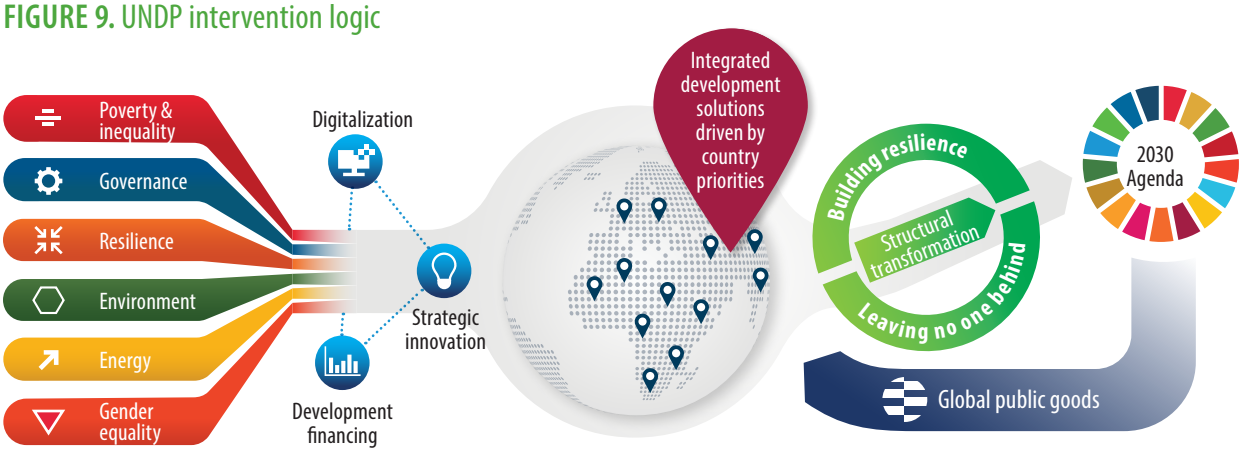
The 2018 UNDP guidance on LNOB recommends that efforts to implement the LNOB pledge utilize three mutually reinforcing 'levers': examine (disaggregated and people-driven data and information), empower (civic engagement and voice) and enact (integrated, equity-focused SDG policies, interventions and budgets).[192] This chapter will discuss the contribution made by UNDP to results benefitting those left furthest behind and the main contributing factors, through the prism of the 'levers' for each of the Signature Solutions.

The UNDP Signature Solutions are six strategic intervention areas "where countries' needs are greatest and where the capabilities and position of UNDP within the United Nations development system best equip the organization to work".[193] The six Signature Solutions are poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, energy and gender equality (*see left-hand side in Figure 9*). UNDP invests in three enablers – strategic innovation, digitalization and development finance – to accelerate results and bring them to scale. The objective is for UNDP to support countries in their path towards the Sustainable Development Goals and towards three directions of change in particular: structural transformation, leaving no one behind and resilience (*see right-hand side in Figure 9*).

[192] A later framework for implementation (undated) provides more information on the three levers. **Examine**: Monitoring SDG progress of all relevant groups and people by collecting, analysing and making available disaggregated and people-driven data and information on who is left behind and why. Track the progress of those furthest left behind relative to everyone else. **Empower**: Enable people that are being left behind to be equal agents in sustainable development, ensuring their full and meaningful participation in decision-making by providing safe and inclusive mechanisms for civic engagement. **Enact**: Develop integrated equity-focused SDG policies, interventions and budgets to support rights-holders and duty-bearers to address the intersecting disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind. (UNDP, 'What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind?').

[193] UNDP independent evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2022, p.1.

FIGURE 9. UNDP intervention logic



Source: UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025

The Signature Solutions are not seen as sectoral or thematic. Rather, they are meant to be integrated, multidisciplinary approaches. They are "not [meant to be] service lines, but rather articulate solution pathways to tackle multidimensional and complex problems that are also adaptable to context".[194] They have been chosen as an organizing principle for this chapter in order to facilitate uptake and use of the evaluative analysis and recommendations.

What emerges from the assessment through the prism of the levers is an 'LNOB integration profile', which shows an organization with two strong poles and several solid programmatic contributions across the examine-empower-enact spectrum, as illustrated in Table 4 below. Signature Solution 1 (poverty and inequality) is making a more visible contribution to the 'examine' lever through its work on data and metrics. Signature Solutions 3 (resilience) and 6 (gender equality) also demonstrate strides in this direction. Signature Solution 2 on democratic governance leads on the 'enact' dimension supporting rights-holders and duty-bearers to address the deprivations that leave people behind at the policy level. Signature Solutions 1 (poverty and inequality), 5 (energy) and 6 (gender equality) are also productive in upstream efforts. All Signature Solutions to some extent contribute to 'empowering' the populations deemed most left behind. The governance, resilience, environment and gender Signature Solutions demonstrate the most visible results.

TABLE 4. Profile of UNDP Signature Solutions with regard to LNOB and RFBF

	Examine	Empower	Enact
Poverty & Inequality			
Governance			
Resilience			
Environment			
Energy			
Gender Equality			

Source: LNOB evaluation team.
Legend: dark green – significant contribution; green – good contribution; yellow – moderate contribution; orange – limited contribution; red – no or ineffective contribution. No Signature Solution was found to make limited or no contribution to LNOB.

[194] United Nations Development Programme, 'Signature Solutions Part 1: Principles, approach and application', UNDP, New York, 2018, p.2.

5.1 Signature Solution 1: Poverty and inequality

The poverty and inequality Signature Solution stands out for its relevant contribution to 'examine' by collecting, analysing and making available to national counterparts disaggregated and people-driven data and information on who is left behind and why as a basis for national policy-making. Through various initiatives including those geared towards the economic empowerment and emergency livelihoods of youth and women as well as through national pro-poor policy support, UNDP also contributes directly to results in the 'enact' realm. Signature Solution 1 also has an 'empower' dimension, which shows more mixed results. Finally, UNDP is positioning itself in development financing initiatives to 'enact' and 'empower', e.g., through its moonshot of helping to raise $1 trillion in public expenditure and private capital for the SDGs.

Finding 11 – Data and analytics: The UNDP commitment to LNOB has materialized in consistent contributions for improving inequality data and analytics among national counterparts to determine who is left behind. This proved useful in policy processes in various countries.

The poverty and inequality Signature Solution has made significant strides in integrating an LNOB lens. Its name change, from "poverty reduction" to "poverty and inequality", is indicative of this transformation, directly emphasizing the relevance of two LNOB elements, namely equality and equity. The shift is in line with the urgency of addressing growing inequalities, the renewed academic interest in the question,[195] as well as the focus of the SDG Agenda on inequality through Goal 10 and the LNOB principle itself. All of the agency's main areas of focus, or 'policy offers', under this Signature Solution (i.e., social protection, financing, informality and the future of work, poverty and inequality metrics) include an overt or implicit LNOB focus, with the aim of contributing to inclusive, job rich, green recovery and development pathways. The extent to which the intention and orientation trickles down to action and results in countries varies.

The focus on agency and potential (rather than the vulnerability) of populations likely to be left behind is in line with the organization's legacy around the capability approach and sets UNDP apart from other more protection-focused organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or UNICEF. However, this added value of UNDP has not yet been fully leveraged or well communicated. UNDP work on inequality is seen by some – externally and within UNDP – as lacking more systematic alignment with the United Nations' human rights-based approach. It is often perceived by staff and stakeholders as heavily focused on economic inequalities, as opposed to political and social inequalities. The desk review confirmed this focus.

One key contribution to LNOB integration – led by Signature Solution 1 – is improved data and analytics, helping governments to determine who is left behind. This work has involved a move away from the previous focus on less well-off urban neighbourhoods or rural areas with higher probability of being

[195] Some important recent texts on the subject include: Piketty, Thomas, '*Capital and Ideology*', Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2020; Stiglitz, Joseph, '*The Price of Inequality: How today's divided society endangers our future*', W.W. Norton & Co, New York, 2012; Milanovic, Branko, '*The Haves and the Have-Nots: A brief and idiosyncratic history of global inequality*', Basic Books, New York, 2011; Atkinson, Anthony, '*Measuring Poverty around the World*', Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2019; Deaton, Angus, '*The Great Escape: Health, wealth, and the origins of inequality*', Princeton University Press, 2013; Schaffer, Paul, 'Moving the Discussion from Poverty to Inequality: Implications for evaluation', in Rist, Ray C. et al., (eds.): '*Poverty, Inequality and Evaluation: Changing perspectives*', World Bank Group, Washington, D.C., 2016. According to Schaffer "[the] "inequality turn" (a) expands the dimensions of deprivation or social "bads" under consideration, (b) changes the focus of causal analysis from households and individuals to social structures and relationships, and (c) enlarges the range of policy instruments and programming options under review".

below the poverty line towards considering the relative gap between various socio-economic groups and intra-household differences (gender, age, ability, etc.). UNDP data initiatives included a variety of products and business units, including:

i. Support to national statistical offices.

ii. Mainstreaming accelerated policy support, implemented by regional bureaux/country offices, which provided governments with an overview of challenges as well as with implementation plans involving other United Nations agencies.

iii. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI/Vulnerability Index), led by the UNDP Human Development Report Office with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative,[196] championing intersectionality and data disaggregation down to the local level.

iv. The Human Development Reports, now with a strong focus on horizontal inequalities.

v. Support to national SDG reports and Voluntary National Reviews to the High-Level Political Forum, fostering the integration of LNOB in SDG follow-up and review processes, as well as, in some cases, civil society involvement.[197]

vi. COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments (led by country offices, sometimes involving other United Nations agencies), which helped discover some 'newly poor' groups,[198] and social registries (following COVID-19), which identify the most deprived, cross-reference with civil registries and help direct scarce public resources to the households left furthest behind.[199] The infrastructure of data generation, robust rapid assessment and strong coordination between government and other stakeholders contributed to efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[200]

vii. The corporate push towards more disaggregated data through principle of #7 the UNDP data strategy, and creation of the data futures platform, bringing together various kinds of data from the United Nations system and partners, allowing for bespoke analyses, estimations and simulations.[201]

viii. CSO capacity development for the collection and analysis of 'people-centred' data that highlight the challenges faced by people at risk of being left behind and can be integrated with deeper socio-economic analysis to improve national statistics and development planning. This is a nascent area of engagement for UNDP.[202]

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196 United Nations Development Programme, '2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste and gender', UNDP, New York, 2021. Alike, Sabina and James Foster, 'Counting and Multidimensional Poverty Measurement', OPHI Working Paper No. 32, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

197 For instance, since 2016, UNDP has supported government and civil society in the Dominican Republic to publish one united VNR instead of a formal and a 'shadow' submission.

198 8 out of 10 'new poor' are in middle-income countries, and some were part of an incipient middle-class. They are typically young, with some education, living in urban areas, and working in the informal sector. Women are overrepresented. World Bank, 'Profiles of the New Poor Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic', World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2020.

199 For instance, the Registro Social in Ecuador is a cadastre that contains individualized social, economic and demographic information at the family level that allows institutions to identify their target populations, better focusing efforts towards groups in conditions of poverty.

200 A successful example is UNDP India's eVIN platform, which helped improve the efficiency of the Universal Immunization Programme. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: India', UNDP, New York, 2022; and triangulated field data gathered in India in 2022.

201 United Nations Development Programme, 'Data Strategy', internal document, UNDP, New York, February 2021. Data principle #7: "Expand frontiers of data: Explore emerging practices and innovative technologies to increase data availability and expand coverage of under-represented groups through data collection and disaggregation". United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP Data Futures Platform', UNDP, 2022.

202 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, Civil Society Engagement in LNOB. See Lesson 8.

Most recently, UNDP analytics work has also included innovative data-generation methods (mobile data, big data, sensemaking, social listening), application of new assessment tools, and theoretical explorations.[203] For example, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific SDG regional integration team is relying on behavioural science and systems thinking to assess how challenges from air pollution to the future of work affect different populations. This work contributed to generating granular data on less visible individuals and groups and the identification of entry points for those that are hard-to-reach. Generating real-time and adequately detailed data remains challenging across many countries, with additional obstacles in conflict and disaster settings.[204]

The generation of disaggregated LNOB data is a core component in the reconstructed theory of change towards LNOB and RFBF (*see Figure 3*). Through investments in trying to provide increased thought leadership, metrics and assessments, in addition to other programmatic and institutional inputs, UNDP aims to improve data systems and knowledge and capacities to 'examine, empower and enact'. Through these and other inputs, governments have the ability to identify who is left behind, which – if political will, budget and government/CSO capacity are also developed – can contribute to leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first.

This reconstructed programme-impact pathway also provided a framework for 'performance stories' for the evaluation. Using process tracing (*see Annex 4*), the evaluation was able to ascertain the specific UNDP contribution to results in four out of the five focus countries. The cases examined were examples of long-standing data-focused interventions that are aligned with LNOB principles. In India, UNDP focused on the spatial dimension of left-behind districts to enable local policies. In the Central African Republic, UNDP helped monitor citizen perceptions in a context where an entire population can be deemed 'left behind'. In Moldova, UNDP strengthened government capacity to disaggregate and use data. In Ecuador, UNDP linked the SDGs to the national development plan and budget with an LNOB focus.[205] The process-tracing study concluded that UNDP contributed to identifying left behind populations in all four countries. The degree to which UNDP influenced and enabled LNOB-responsive policy, planning and budgeting, meanwhile, differed from country to country (*see Annex 4*).

Process tracing indicated that initiatives were particularly influential in the presence of certain enabling factors. First, where country teams were better trained and more experienced in strengthening the data capacities of national governments, more sustainable results were achieved. Second, a systemic view, taking into account the national data ecosystem, helped utility and uptake of data and was associated with national ownership of results. Third, anchoring data in existing reporting, planning or budgeting mechanisms, such as national development frameworks, led to frequent and consistent data collection, which strengthened quality and utility. Finally, ensuring buy-in by (and added value for) ministries, including through high-level advocacy, proved pivotal for the upstream use of data. Bringing in external institutions that enjoy high credibility helped generate commitment to use the data to inform policy and programming.

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[203] UNDP independent evaluation, India; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Jordan', UNDP, New York, 2022. Inclusive and rights-based data collection, management and use, including innovative approaches, are highlighted as part of an operational outcome in the UNDP Digital Strategy.

[204] Triangulated field data.

[205] The overarching claim assessed was: "UNDP helps improve livelihoods for the most deprived by supporting countries in determining who is 'left behind'". While the impact level ("improve livelihoods") was not traceable with the data made available by stakeholders, the evaluation was able to assess to what degree UNDP succeeded in supporting data work that informed LNOB-responsive policy, planning and budgeting.

Finding 12 – Poverty and inequality: Given the scale and interconnectedness of poverty and inequality issues globally, UNDP is increasingly focusing on more strategic and innovative paths and is contributing to results on integrated sustainable development finance, addressing informality and social protection to enhance reach and promote benefits for the furthest behind.

Fighting poverty and inequality is at the core of the UNDP mandate. However, demonstrating clear results of UNDP work at the level of those left behind has been difficult – without making gross generalizations or failing to adequately recognize the decentralized nature of UNDP work. Numerous past evaluations have documented the organization's struggles to reduce poverty and inequality significantly and sustainably. For instance, a 2018 synthesis study of UNDP independent country programme evaluations (previously called 'assessment of development results'), found that over a third of the 105 assessed evaluations since 2005 deemed the organization's contribution to poverty reduction to be "limited", the lowest value on a four-point scale.[206]

The 2018 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Poverty Reduction in Least Developed Countries', for instance, concluded that "inclusive growth and employment projects in LDCs could not generate scalable and transformative solutions for enhancing productive capacities" and that "UNDP's contribution to sustainable livelihoods is often insufficient to make a visible difference in many LDCs, due to the small scale of its work in relation to the magnitude of the problem".[207] In middle-income countries, the main constraint is that UNDP only sporadically intervenes with poverty and inequality programming there altogether.[208] There are many factors playing into the organization's limited ability to show performance, including: the sheer scale of the poverty issue[209] and its complexities; the heavy reliance on government political will to take UNDP proposals forward or to take programmes to scale; and the interconnected nature of poverty with other development issues, from environmental degradation to good governance to education. These challenges are all well documented in the evaluations cited above.[210] UNDP and other development actors are also up against the challenge of proving contribution and attribution, in line with the macro-micro paradox.[211]

While UNDP has reached the furthest behind through some of its initiatives, this has not added up to larger-scale change. For instance, economic empowerment initiatives targeting women and youth were a salient part of the UNDP offer. Many of these interventions reached their stated aims at the output level, and there is evidence that several have been impactful to affected individuals themselves. For example,

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206 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation Synthesis', UNDP, New York 2018, p.21.

207 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Poverty Reduction in Least Developed Countries', UNDP, New York, 2019, pp.102 and 104.

208 The 2020 evaluation of UNDP development cooperation in middle-income countries points out that while "UNDP has several relevant offerings [in Signature Solution 1], their presence in MIC country programmes has been sporadic" and that among the poverty and inequality-targeted interventions, only "some projects have shown effective linkages with upstream policy processes besides strengthening community livelihoods". UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Development Cooperation in Middle-Income Countries', UNDP, New York, 2020, p.58.

209 E.g. sub-Saharan African poverty rates do not fall fast enough to offset population growth. The number of extreme poor has risen from 284 million to 433 million between 1990 and 2018, despite declining rates of poverty. Source: Schoch, Marta and Christoph Lakner, 'The Number of Poor People Continues to rise in Sub-Saharan Africa, Despite a Slow Decline in the Poverty Rate', World Bank blogs, World Bank, December 16, 2020, accessed October 2022.

210 In contexts of weak state capacity, the international community is heavily involved in drafting policies or even constitutions. Yet a solid framework may not lead to implementation. Fombad, Charles, 'Africa and Transnational Constitutionalism', *Oxford Bibliographies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020.

211 The paradox whereby aid agencies report the success of most of their programmes, yet it is impossible to establish any significant correlation between aid and GDP growth in developing countries. Complexity and multidimensionality are innate to poverty; highly aggregated claims on 'poverty reduction' are unlikely to be confirmed.

youth participants in UNDP-sponsored entrepreneurship trainings in Egypt[212] shared with this evaluation that they see UNDP as a leading incubator for start-up support. Young women in particular appreciated the skills training offered, including the possibility to practice new soft skills with experts. In the Central African Republic, UNDP efforts to provide economic opportunities to populations outside the capital through targeted emergency employment were pertinent, according to the independent country programme evaluation (ICPE),[213] and field visits for this evaluation unearthed many stories of how UNDP work made a difference in the lives of project participants, including the indigenous population and ex-combatants. However, economic empowerment initiatives were found to be small-scale, short-term, fragmented, not well integrated with other UNDP initiatives, and unevenly implemented.

UNDP has employed useful upstream policy-influencing strategies aligned with regional and national contexts in its poverty reduction efforts, which are relevant to the furthest behind and can contribute to potentially sustainable results. This included national development strategies, poverty reduction strategies, macroeconomic policy, inclusive value chains and market development, employment promotion, green growth, industrial small and medium-sized enterprise sector development, and social protection policies, among others. Pro-poor policy efforts were deemed broadly successful in past evaluations,[214] and are powerful tools due to their universalism and potential cascading effects. UNDP provided funding and technical support that facilitated capacity-building, policy and legal reforms that ultimately enhanced service delivery, rights promotion, skilling and opportunities for employment and resilience. These initiatives may benefit those furthest behind in the medium- to long-term; however, their impact on the furthest left behind is not clearly documented.

While baseline data are not yet routinely established in order to enable a subsequent assessment of sustained impact, the focus on development finance, informality and social protection may enable broader and more sustainable results for the furthest behind. Against the backdrop of the challenges described above, UNDP has laid out new, bolder ways of contributing to reducing poverty and inequalities. By putting development finance at the heart of its SP, UNDP is increasing the stakes and showing bold commitment to reaching the furthest behind. However, as mentioned in the recent finance recovery evaluation, the UNDP domestic resource mobilization offer is still limited and could benefit from a more strategic focus.[215] The current portfolio of SDG development financing does not provide a platform for movement towards the $1 trillion moonshot yet.

Social protection systems, in their broader understanding (financial benefits, social services and active labour market measures), are an important instrument for identifying, reaching out to, registering and supporting the furthest behind populations. UNDP is well positioned to make a strong contribution to this key LNOB area, which was emphasized by the Secretary-General in "Our Common Agenda".[216] In some of the countries assessed as part of this evaluation (e.g., Haiti, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Afghanistan), UNDP supported improved access to social protection through policy design and information systems that benefitted persons living with disabilities, women and children, among others. For instance, in Montenegro, UNDP supported the introduction of an e-social card and interoperability of the social registry with other institutions, combining the delivery of hardware and software with

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212 UNDP independent evaluation, Egypt.

213 UNDP independent evaluation, CAR.

214 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP support to LDCs; UNDP independent evaluation, poverty reduction.

215 Several recommendations of the recent evaluation on 'Financing the Recovery' ask for a more strategic approach and streamlining of the finance portfolio. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Financing the Recovery'.

216 United Nations, 'Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary General', United Nations, New York, 2017.

policy and institutional development advice, which contributed to more sustainable systems.[217] UNDP has been a regular contributor to joint programmes under the joint SDG fund window for "Leaving No One Behind – Social Protection", partnering with sister agencies to support social protection projects in 18 countries.[218]

Building on the social protection component of the UNDP COVID-19 response and learning from its implementation, the UNDP social protection offer (2021)[219] is a renewed push and key to balancing out the UNDP portfolio, which placed the burden on those considered poor or 'left behind' to use their own capabilities to improve their lives, focusing mostly on skills-development programming. Similarly, the longstanding UNDP agenda to promote pro-poor and progressive (fair and re-distributive) taxation systems is being rekindled, e.g., through the organization's recently launched 'Tax for SDGs Initiative'.[220] This could, in time, respond to a recent evaluation recommendation for UNDP to challenge public spending practices that fail to address deeply ingrained inequalities, following the guiding principle of progressive universalism – the goal of extending greater levels of support and public finance to those who are being left behind.[221]

The organization's work on informality has the potential to improve livelihoods for some of the most left-behind populations, given the overlap between informality and vulnerability. UNDP Jordan, for instance, conducted a 'sensemaking' exercise that identified innovative and resilient business models able to generate and transform work in the context of COVID-19 recovery – thus challenging existing perceptions of informality and potentially paving the way towards transforming the livelihoods of the most left-behind workers.[222]

5.2 Signature Solution 2: Governance

The main LNOB-related strength of the governance Signature Solution is 'enact', or supporting the development of policies, interventions and budgets to address the intersecting disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind. Governance also makes a good contribution to the 'empower' dimension of LNOB.

Finding 13 – Governance: Upstream approaches to strengthening the capacities of national and local governance institutions, policy dialogue and promoting SDG integration have generated relevant UNDP contributions to populations most likely to be left behind. Results for the furthest behind were achieved in the areas of rule of law and health provision, with more mixed outcomes for downstream interventions on political participation.

Under the governance Signature Solution, there was more visible adherence to the human rights-based approach to programming compared to other Signature Solutions.[223] In the past decade, the UNDP governance portfolio expanded further from a specialist role in elections and political participation towards broader institutional strengthening of the national and local governance systems that underpin

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217 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation, Montenegro', UNDP, New York, 2020.

218 UNDP also engages in global and regional-level discussions, e.g. implementing the Social Protection Floor Initiative established by the UN Chief Executive Board in 2009.

219 United Nations Development Programme, 'BPPS Service Offer: Social Protection'.

220 UNDP launches a new initiative to help countries leverage taxation to make progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

221 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Financing the Recovery'.

222 UNDP, 'Setting Out on a Journey to Destigmatize and Learn From Jordan's Informal Economy'.

223 UNDP has a longstanding track record as global leader in promoting human rights, democracy and good governance.

all other Signature Solutions. Across varied contexts, UNDP strengthened structures, policies, legislation, frameworks and systems that benefit populations considered 'left behind'. In Kazakhstan, UNDP worked directly with persons with disabilities to devise a national plan and prototype of a portal for service delivery and assistive devices. As a result, 80 percent of social support claims by PwDs were channelled digitally through this portal during the COVID-19 pandemic, and lessons about the need to attend to the risks of digital exclusion were duly recorded.[224] In India, UNDP supported the rights of tribal peoples, particularly with regard to land tenure. Guidelines for community forest rights and for the recognition of habitat rights and the rights of pastoral communities were drawn up by two committees with technical assistance from UNDP. Ministry officials highlighted the crucial role of UNDP in convening the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee on Forest Rights.[225] However, delays and inefficiencies in implementation of the digital app for filling land rights claims meant that no claim was officially processed in the system as of October 2021.[226]

The organization's SDG integration work, including on measurement of SDG 16, has particularly significant potential for supporting the LNOB agenda. UNDP supports national institutions to establish platforms and mechanisms that integrate the SDGs as part of national and local policy-making. This includes generating data on populations likely to be left behind, and simulation of policy scenarios to support them. In India, UNDP supported SDG coordination centres (SDGCC) as the institutional mechanism to fast-track SDGs achievement at the states level. One successful example is the SDGCC in Karnataka, which designed and developed *Akanksha*, a corporate social responsibility convening platform, commissioned to bring together various governmental, non-profit and private actors for community development. It managed to mobilize $36.5 million for 95 projects, several of which target populations left furthest behind.[227] In Ecuador, UNDP technical support was acknowledged to have strengthened institutional competencies for implementation of the SDGs.[228] However, fieldwork at local level conducted for this evaluation found mixed results, mostly due to lack of sustainability planning, e.g., with the local governments of Quito and Cuenca.

Several data initiatives related to measurement of SDG 16[229] are also promising, in particular with regard to tackling non-discrimination. Country teams in Sudan, Botswana, Tunisia and Iraq are piloting initiatives aimed at measuring SDG 16.6.2 (which relates to satisfaction with public services) through citizen feedback from community radio,[230] while the Moldova country office and innovation team are exploring new data sources to report against SDG 16 targets.[231]

UNDP activities related to legal identity and access to justice targeted furthest behind populations, with some noteworthy results. UNDP work on legal identity established the foundation for inclusion of marginalized and uncounted groups and individuals. In the Pacific Island of Vanuatu, UNDP capitalized on an elections project to support the rollout of a digital national ID system. This entailed painstaking work to get to communities, villages and small boats with electronic templates to capture data and information on remote citizens so that the government can reach them with services such as education

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224 UNDP independent evaluation, Kazakhstan.

225 UNDP independent evaluation, India.

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

228 UNDP independent evaluation, Ecuador.

229 SDG 16 - Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

230 Thapa, Anisha and Gamal Mohammed Alhassan, 'Voicing Through Airwaves - Engaging citizens to improve public service delivery in East Sudan', UNDP, Khartoum, 2018.

231 UNDP independent evaluation, Moldova.

and healthcare.[232] In the Central African Republic, one of the least-developed countries in the world, the agency's extensive support to the electoral process through the production and shipment of voter ID cards yielded a national-scale unintended positive outcome: as the majority of the population is not on the national civil registry, the digitized voter cards proved vital for previously undocumented citizens.[233] Based on the testimony of village chiefs, an estimated 50-60 percent of voters now use their voter ID cards as official IDs at banks and other institutions and at travel check points, potentially paving the way for the establishment of a more reliable civil registration system in CAR.[234] In the same country, UNDP technical and financial support was critical to the reform of the justice sector through the establishment of the Special Criminal Court, the reactivation of ordinary courts and mobile courts ("*audiences foraines*") in remote areas.[235]

UNDP achieved strong performance in setting up governance structures that are crucial for LNOB rights-holders. It was, however, less successful in ensuring their effective functioning over time. In CAR, the judicial structures that were set up to restore state presence and support transitional justice were mostly inactive five years after their reinstitution. In Nigeria, the UNDP-supported National Human Rights Commission case reporting and management platform claims it logged about 5,000 gender-based violence and human rights-related calls (70 percent women) through its toll-free line. However, the recent independent country programme evaluation found no recorded results on the outcome of these logged cases. In Uganda, the UNDP 'Rule of Law and Constitutional Democracy' flagship programme provided increased access to legal aid to poor and vulnerable groups – especially the elderly, people with and affected by HIV and AIDS, youth, and female-headed households.[236] Despite contextual and operational challenges, UNDP support to both state and non-state organizations in establishing context-sensitive grievance mechanisms for mediation and arbitration as well as informal/traditional justice systems has been considered crucial to promote principles of non-discrimination and realize the rights of some of the furthest behind populations.

The organization's longstanding expertise on access to health and in engaging with parliamentarians was channelled towards the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in relevant and effective ways. UNDP supported 59 countries through 'Being LGBTQI+', an umbrella for regional programmes in the Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean and Asia Pacific regions.[237] Through unorthodox methods of engagement, such as inclusive public discourse training for members of parliament, UNDP contributed to several noteworthy results, such as the legalization of the third gender in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and advancing discussions on the topic in Bhutan, as well as the approval by decree of the new penal code in Haiti, introducing the rights of LGBTQI+ people and fighting against all forms of discrimination.[238] According to interview respondents, the UNDP country office in the Dominican Republic is a champion in this work, supporting a significant national agenda for LGBTQI+ rights, which benefits from the cooperation of an active civil society, an interested private sector, and aligning international cooperation agendas. The

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232 UNDP independent evaluation, Pacific countries.

233 UNDP independent evaluation, CAR. Projects: "Projet d'observation citoyenne des élections pour un processus crédible, transparent et apaisé en RCA"; 'Rapport thematique d'observation electorale sur l'etablissement du fichier electoral et la production des cartes d'electeur en republique centrafricaine (1er juin-15 décembre 2020)', (Thematic report of electoral observation on the establishment of the voting register and the production of voting cards in the Central African Republic), Réseau Arc-En-Ciel, 2020.

234 UNDP independent evaluation, CAR.

235 Ibid.

236 UNDP independent evaluation, Uganda.

237 See Being LGBTQI+ in Asia and the Pacific, Being LGBTI in the Caribbean and Being LGBTQI+ in Eastern Europe. The programme resulted in the publication of Advancing the Human Rights and Inclusion of LGBTQI+ People: A Handbook for Parliamentarians.

238 UNDP independent evaluation, Haiti.

UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States has not to date been able to identify a workable entry point for a regional initiative in this regard, although several options could be explored, such as engaging with moderate religious leaders to highlight the narratives of compassion and non-discrimination contained in scriptures. In Egypt, UNDP helped link the government HIV programme and non-governmental organizations working in the field to reach out to 3,531 men and 496 women with HIV prevention packages in 2020.[239] Some partner non-governmental organization (NGOs) engaged in this work were able to expand their services to legal, psychosocial and economic empowerment, and to previously unreached populations such as intravenous drug users and sex workers, which per the fieldwork for this evaluation positively impacted beneficiaries and increased their social inclusion and support by the community. However, according to some respondents, the fact that the same NGOs provide services to all these groups may have had an adverse effect on LGBTQI+ persons by associating them with drug users and sex workers, leading to further stigma.

Overall, UNDP efforts to enhance political participation had mixed results for populations likely to be left behind. UNDP electoral support for candidates and voter engagement had limited effects on the furthest behind for the sampled countries, despite the availability of relevant guidance relating to particular populations such as women, persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people,[240] and there was inadequate monitoring of UNDP contribution to results.[241] For instance, triangulated evidence shows that internally displaced people (about 13 percent of the population) could not be included in UNDP voter registration for their constituency of origin in the Central African Republic, which took place in volatile circumstances. In Moldova, the support of UNDP and partners was credited with promoting a more gender-balanced parliament, with 40 percent of elected members of parliament being women in 2021. UNDP also provided extensive support to parliamentary capacity-building and awareness-raising for women members of parliament. However, this has not (yet) led to significant legislative changes in favour of gender equality.[242]

Research shows that all else being equal, developing countries that have a higher share of women parliamentarians are more likely to pass comprehensive laws on sexual harassment, rape, divorce and domestic violence.[243] Nevertheless, the assumption implicit in the programme that women parliamentarians will necessarily work to promote gender equality may be too simplistic, because other variables could intervene.[244] While increased gender balance in parliament can be considered a positive result in and of itself, achieving results in terms of a more equitable society will take time. In other contexts, such as CAR and Ecuador, there were no data available on how many women elected as MPs had participated in UNDP interventions. Evidence from other sources suggests that UNDP electoral support was more inclusive when it adopted the electoral cycle approach, with assistance provided before, during and after an election. One example is Timor Leste, where UNDP capacity-building for the Electoral Management Body, support for voter education and engagement with women, youth and persons with disabilities

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239 UNDP independent evaluation, Egypt.

240 See, for example, 'Political Participation of Persons with Intellectual or Psychosocial Disabilities', UNDP, New York, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 'Advancing the Human Rights and Inclusion of LGBTI People: A Handbook for Parliamentarians', UNDP, New York, 2017; United Nations Development Programme, 'Global Handbook: Parliaments as partners supporting the Women, Peace and Security agenda', UNDP, New York, 2019.

241 To fully assess contribution, countries would need to start with a baseline and stakeholder mapping and frequently measure progress all the way to the election.

242 UNDP independent evaluation, Moldova.

243 Asiedu, Elizabeth et al., The Effect of Women's Representation in Parliament and the Passing of Gender Sensitive Policies.

244 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Reflections – Lessons from Evaluations: Boosting women's political participation', UNDP, New York, 2022.

contributed to high levels of participation; this in turn strengthened the integrity and legitimacy of the broader democratic process, resulting in a more stable political environment and culminating in the peaceful transfer of power.[245] In the Solomon Islands, UNDP continued its voter education efforts during COVID-19 by attaching voter information to commercial bags of rice for sale throughout the islands to extend its reach to geographically marginalized groups.[246]

5.3 Signature Solution 3: Resilience

The resilience Signature Solution has contributed to 'examine' LNOB issues in data-scarce settings and to 'empower' certain targeted groups, such as IDPs, women and youth – mainly through emergency livelihoods programmes. Upstream work has included mediation and climate adaption work with government and other actors.

Finding 14 – Resilience: Conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction programming successfully reached left behind target populations. Volatile settings pose additional challenges to effectively identifying, accessing and supporting the most disadvantaged. Climate adaptation programming strengthened government capacities to address the needs of those likely to be left behind, but results were hindered by a siloed approach.

Examine

The organization's data-driven approach to resilience contributed to relevant results for left-behind populations through use of rigorous assessment and integrated planning tools such as conflict sensitivity assessments, area-based approaches, and post-disaster needs assessments. When well implemented, these captured the needs of the furthest behind to support integrated programming responses. For example, UNDP produced gender-sensitive disaster assessment studies and guidelines in several countries and prioritized women's participation in community climate risk assessment and adaptation planning. Interview respondents also highlighted the value of UNDP support to capturing information on, and serving, disadvantaged host communities, internally displaced populations (IDPs) and unregistered refugees, as these populations are often underserved.[247] In Uganda, for example, UNDP and others supported the Ugandan Ministry of Water and Environment in developing a detailed water and environment sector response plan for refugees and host communities.[248] In Fiji, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and other partners, UNDP helped develop a successful methodology for producing annual reports on the characteristics of displacement at country level.[249] As part of this initiative, mobility, governance and climate adaptation professionals collaborated in a cross-sectoral fashion that is commendable and rare.

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245 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Reflections – Lessons from Evaluations: UNDP Support to Electoral Process', UNDP, New York, 2020; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Timor Leste', UNDP, New York, 2018.

246 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'UNDP Support to Electoral Process'. See also United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs: 'UN Electoral Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic, A practical guide for UN electoral advisers', UNDP and DPPA, 2020.

247 E.g., Around half the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are unregistered and therefore UNHCR cannot include them in its mandate. This groups is marginalized and subject to trafficking, child labour, and GBV. UNDP serves unregistered refugees extensively through its development-focused approach, including interventions related to livelihoods and social cohesion to reduce tensions between host and refugee communities.

248 Independent evaluation, Uganda.

249 UNDP independent evaluation, Pacific countries.

Nevertheless, the majority of assessments and interventions remain siloed between conflict, disaster response and reduction, and climate adaptation. Integrated approaches that adequately consider LNOB and RFBF and intersectionality are not yet mainstreamed. A noteworthy exception is 'DX4Resilience'[250] (Accelerating Disaster Risk Reduction and Enhancing Crisis Response through Digital Solutions). Its activities include mapping and analysis of vulnerable groups (MAVG) based on the five LNOB factors to better understand risks and needs and the opportunities for developing digital solutions that will benefit those most at risk. To date, the MAVG has been conducted as a pilot in Nepal, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Empower

UNDP expertise as a bridge across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus enabled adaptability and versatility in delivery of results for LNOB. In most conflict settings where national institutions have collapsed, UNDP has effectively strengthened community-led local governance institutions. For example, the project 'Reinforcement of Resilience among Youth and Women in support of Human Security in Northern Mali' established highly successful partnerships with municipal councils and civic groups by establishing citizens' assemblies that facilitated selection of beneficiaries for youth economic empowerment activities.[251] UNDP has also effectively addressed inequity and gender discrimination in many crisis settings, e.g. Syria and Yemen, through well-designed and development-focused integrated crisis response, with interventions including short-term income generation, provision of social services and conditional cash transfers, skills training, maternal and child health, and gender-based violence support.[252] A UNDP Yemen-commissioned lessons learned study highlighted some of the enabling factors, including highly effective strategic partnerships, innovation, high cost-effectiveness, and wide reach to the most vulnerable communities.[253]

Another example highlighted by interview respondents is the case of Afghanistan following the US withdrawal in August 2021. UNDP negotiated humanitarian access to the furthest left behind populations and advocated for the implementation of programmes relating to women's rights, education and economic participation. In parallel, UNDP collaborated with 13 United Nations agencies on a flagship project, the 'Area-Based Approach to Development Emergency Initiatives',[254] to apply tailored interventions based on localized needs of the Afghan population. The programme shows adaptive management by UNDP in a difficult context and differentiated targeting of those considered left behind.

In fragile settings such as CAR, Afghanistan and Yemen, language and basic access to electricity, the internet, smartphones and computers remain barriers in going the last mile and reaching the furthest behind, such as people in rural communities. The evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries states that UNDP has barely adopted an intersectional perspective in such settings, which in

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250 This is a pilot initiative that has not been independently evaluated.

251 UNDP independent evaluation, youth economic empowerment.

252 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Independent Country Programme Evaluation: Yemen', UNDP, New York, 2019; Apex Consulting Firm, 'USAID-Funded SFD Components of Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project (YECRP): Final evaluation report', USAID, Washington, D.C., 2019.

253 United Nations Development Programme: 'Lessons Learned Study: Yemen emergency crisis response project', UNDP, New York, 2019.

254 The programme was established in October 2021 with $96.4m in funding and covers four different pillars: provision of essential services, supporting community economies and livelihoods, protecting farm-based vulnerability to disasters, and social cohesion at the community level. United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP Announces the Single Most Significant Agreement under ABADEI with Islamic Relief', UNDP, 2022.

turn reinforces deep-rooted inequalities and undermines efforts towards sustainable peace.[255] Further, in active conflict settings such as Yemen, women and youth were not always reachable as the volatile security situation meant they would refrain from leaving their homes. Overall, existing beneficiaries were often not the most marginalized or left behind. The furthest behind may instead include homeless youth of all genders, the landless, ethnic minorities, internally displaced people and specifically women and persons living with disabilities from within these groups. Some interview respondents attributed this apparent gap in UNDP targeting to the fact that UNDP operations are run indirectly through government bodies and NGO partners who may not be aware of, or prioritize, the LNOB principle.

UNDP work on disaster preparedness and recovery has contributed to relevant results for certain populations likely to be left behind, in particular for poor and rural women and youth. The 'Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme', a collaboration between UNDP and the United Nations Capital Development Fund, utilized mobile apps to improve financial product access to women and differently-abled people in the aftermath of natural disaster.[256] In Ecuador, the 'Population Resilience' project supported rural communities living in extreme poverty – with an emphasis on female-headed households and children and adolescents facing 'double marginalization' – affected by the September 2018 earthquake in the centre of the country (Chillanes). Twelve rural communities improved their resilience to natural disasters by activating community committees and maintaining the drinking water network. The engagement of citizens (especially women and youth) and local organizations of beneficiary communities was key to the sustainability of project results.[257]

Application of LNOB principles in climate adaptation work was sparse. The 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Climate Change Adaptation' (2020) found that UNDP is on par with or ahead of its peers for its focus on gender equality in its adaptation work.[258] A significant majority of UNDP assistance with the explicit objective of adaptation is financed by vertical funds such as the Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund, for which UNDP applies rigorous gender considerations.[259] However, triangulated data from this evaluation corroborated the finding of the global evaluation that UNDP could not identify concrete objectives to improve gender equality in some aspects of its adaptation programming, providing scope for improvement.[260] This was visible in some of the smaller projects reviewed as part of the evaluation, such as the 'Resilient Communities for Women's Empowerment' project in Moldova. A total of 636 women-headed households were trained on setting up small-scale climate resilient operations with income-generating potential, and 37 NGOs were trained on climate change, environment and gender. The expected impacts are formulated in a gender-blind way and include reduced energy bills, alternative income provision to support families and grow business, and piloting environment-friendly businesses models that are climate-resilient and have high potential for replication.[261] At the time of writing this evaluation, it was not clear how these activities connect or what impact they achieved, especially for groups who are affected by intersectional factors that integrate both human- and nature-induced risks.

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255 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Conflict-Affected Countries', UNDP, New York, 2020.

256 UNDP independent evaluation, Pacific countries.

257 UNDP independent evaluation, Ecuador.

258 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support for Climate Adaptation', UNDP, New York, 2020.

259 See GEF Corporate Scorecard June 2020 and searchable database of GCF gender analyses and action plans.

260 UNDP independent evaluation, climate adaptation.

261 Sustainable and resilient communities; UNDP independent evaluation, Moldova.

The elderly and persons living with disabilities were among the least-supported groups in UNDP resilience work, although conflict is a major driver for inducing war-related disability and the elderly and disabled are significantly challenged to migrate. With regard to disability inclusion, a gap between guidance on integrated human rights standards and principles and practice was noted,[262] which interview respondents attributed to two reasons. First, donor funding priorities tended to exclude disability support and inclusion. Second, in some contexts, support for PwDs was deemed ill-advised as it could be perceived as supporting warring parties (former combatants). However, this assumption excludes the high numbers of civilians who incur disabilities in conflict settings.

With regard to the elderly, one example is from the regional Syria crisis response programme in Turkey, where language and skills-building interventions were geared towards youth and women of working age and the elderly were overlooked.[263] Another example stems from fieldwork for this evaluation in Odisha, India, and relates to the post-disaster recovery programme 'Housing for All', which targeted rural populations affected by floods. To be entitled to a house, the household needed to have young members, thus excluding elder households. In addition, the programme operated on a refund basis, requiring households to build their house through their own means and then get reimbursed, which excluded the poorest people who could not afford building the house on a reimbursement basis and those (with disabilities, elderly or with health conditions) who could not put in their own labour.

Enact

UNDP is currently supporting around 50 countries to develop and build the capacity to implement national adaptation plans (NAPs) with financing from the Green Climate Fund, the German Government, the European Union and other partners. According to UNDP, a gender-responsive NAP process is a central focus of the support and includes strengthening the evidence base for gender and climate change by enhancing the availability of sex-disaggregated data, including by analysing the gender differentiated impact of climate change and developing gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring and evaluation frameworks. It also includes increasing the participation of women's groups and gender actors in developing, implementing and updating NAPs. Nevertheless, intersections between gender and other LNOB factors such as discrimination (ethnicity, disability) and socio-economic status are not visibly taken into account in the UNDP approach.

The 'Framework for Enhancing Gender and Poverty Integration in Climate Finance' (2021)[264] is a good example of an integrated approach, working across Signature Solutions, and of an intersectional approach, focusing on overlapping vulnerabilities related to poverty, gender, ethnicity and geographical situation. It provides an overview of the various entry points for enhancing gender and poverty dimensions within three climate finance systems and sources: national public climate finance, innovative climate finance and multilateral climate finance. This acknowledges that there is still very little understanding of, and evidence on, applying integrated policy and governance frameworks that fully recognize the synergies between gender, poverty, resilience, climate finance and the Sustainable Development Goals, with attention to LNOB. Although LNOB was not explicitly addressed in the climate

[262] Tango International, 'Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan Evaluation', 3RP Joint Secretariat, 2022.

[263] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach', UNDP, New York, 2020.

[264] The framework was developed in partnership with the Bangkok Regional Hub's Strengthening the Governance of Climate Change Finance (GCCF). United Nations Development Programme, 'A Framework for Enhancing Gender and Poverty Integration in Climate Finance', UNDP, New York, 2021.

mitigation work reviewed for this evaluation, it is evident that UNDP has had success with regard to gender and has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the possibilities inherent in climate finance flows for further integration of LNOB.

5.4 Signature Solution 4: Environment

The environment Signature Solution has focused on an 'empower' approach to LNOB, mainly by engaging with indigenous peoples and local communities on biodiversity and conservation issues. This is important because rural deprivation is exacerbated by the mismanagement of ecosystems by third parties. Some intersectional work focused on women, people living in rural areas, indigenous peoples and youth was found in some instances to be more successful than others.

Finding 15 – Environment: The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) has excelled at documenting success stories in reaching some of the furthest-behind populations, with an emphasis on women, youth and indigenous peoples and local communities. Operationalization of the UNDP local action offer promises further attention to overlapping and multiple forms of marginalization.

UNDP has achieved relevant results supporting the social inclusion of marginalized groups, including women, indigenous peoples, youth and people with disabilities through its Small Grants Programme (SGP) since 1992. The effectiveness of SGP grants in particular has been independently rated as high, partially due to the level of engagement of local stakeholders and to the ownership of the programme by local communities.[265] Through small grants – typically $50,000 or less – SGP simultaneously engages in capacity development and concrete biodiversity and conservation projects in a participatory manner. National coordinators train the local communities on how to fill out grant proposals, which are often accepted in local languages or via participatory videos. The target populations – often the most remote and marginalized – are part of decision-making through the SGP governance structures, with focal persons on gender, indigenous peoples and youth. Annual monitoring reports or corporate annual reports provide information about the percentage of projects that have targeted various groups.[266] This modus operandi corresponds to the aspirations for partnerships with UNDP as voiced by a civil society roundtable as part of this evaluation, and by CSO survey respondents (*see Finding 4*).

Projects funded through the SGP apply an 'empower' lens to LNOB and typically target predetermined 'groups', with limited prior gender or power analysis (but paying some attention to overlapping vulnerabilities). Examples are integrating indigenous biodiversity knowledge systems and facilitating intergenerational learning in South Africa;[267] supporting sustainable land and forest management while promoting women's rights and empowerment in Guatemala;[268] and educating indigenous leaders on property rights and conflict resolution in Bolivia.[269] In 2020, SGP launched a 'Global Innovation

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265 GEF Independent Evaluation Office and UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Third Joint GEF-UNDP Evaluation of the Small Grants Programme', GEF and UNDP, New York, 2021.

266 From 2020-2021, 22 percent of completed SGP projects involved indigenous peoples. A total of 889 indigenous leaders participated in various activities supported by the SGP. Global Environment Fund and United Nations Development Programme, 'Small Grants Programme Results Report, 2020-2021', GEF and UNDP, New York, 2021. Youth is a focus of over 40 percent of SGP projects; GEF and UNDP joint evaluation, Small Grants Programme.

267 Global Environment Fund and United Nations Development Programme, 'The GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report, 2019-2020', GEF and UNDP, New York, 2020.

268 Global Environment Fund and United Nations Development Programme, 'The GEF Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report, 2018-2019', GEF and UNDP, New York, 2019.

269 Global Environment Fund and United Nations Development Programme, 'Results from The GEF Small Grants Programme 2015', GEF and UNDP, New York, 2016.

Programme on Persons with Disabilities and Responsive Development'.[270] Youth have led initiatives on ancestral knowledge and practices in Guatemala and Viet Nam; women's empowerment in Morocco, and ocean pollution reduction in Seychelles and the Bahamas.[271]

Women interviewed for this evaluation stressed the strong psychosocial benefits derived from participating in the assessed projects. In India, the 'Plastic Waste Management' project, implemented in 37 cities, aims at inclusion and improved livelihoods for waste-pickers, or *Safai Sathis*, who are mostly women. So far 4,500 *Safai Sathis* have been issued occupational ID cards by urban local bodies; more than 300 have been helped with issuance of ration cards to ensure food security for themselves and their families; and bank accounts have been opened for 500 of them to help with financial inclusion.[272] The project involved women waste-pickers in planning, monitoring and implementation of activities. Women confirmed that they received financial assistance, scholarships for their children's education, health services and support in accessing various entitlements. Women project participants particularly valued the support received during the COVID-induced lockdown in the form of rations and other supplies. The women also benefitted from a sense of security, belonging and collective identity/recognition. For example, a woman waste-picker from Patna was recognized nationally, which she described as a life-altering experience given her socio-economic background. In Egypt, the project 'Strengthening Protected Area Financing and Management Systems' included a component on financial empowerment of Bedouin women, with two key interventions: provision of financial services and poultry-rearing. Thirty percent of women took out loans to establish income-generating activities or microbusinesses.[273] Interviews indicate that awareness-building and infrastructure renovation had a great influence on protecting the environment, preserving cultural heritage and attracting more tourists to visit, thereby increasing employment. The networking aspects of the project opened the door for more communication and support from the government to local communities.

The promotion of indigenous land rights is a longstanding area of UNDP intervention with high relevance to LNOB. It is one of the few areas where UNDP works on ethnicity issues and addresses discrimination and longstanding political tensions. Many indigenous people see themselves as indigenous First Nations, and as such they have claimed the right to self-determination, which some governments perceive as a threat. This wider development agenda has been conducive to advocacy for indigenous rights.[274] UNDP has provided training for indigenous peoples on how to interact with the United Nations through its *Learning for Nature* website, which has reached more than 45,000 learners. Some intersectional thinking was found in the topics offered by the 100+ courses.[275] UNDP has also contributed to results through multi-agency partnerships on indigenous and community conservation areas (ICCA) with the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre, the International Union for

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270 GEF and UNDP, Small Grants Programme Annual Monitoring Report, 2019-2020.

271 United Nations Development Programme, 'Youth in Action: Experiences from the Small Grants Programme', UNDP, New York, 2020.

272 Quarterly progress reports 2020 and 2021.

273 UNDP independent evaluation, Egypt.

274 For instance, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other instruments like the ILO Convention 169 have given a framework within which the UN can work to be the good conscience of governments. Media attention to the plight of indigenous peoples as well as the solutions they can provide, along with research quantifying the contributions of indigenous peoples, have also been key in acceptance of these local stakeholders on the global stage. International Labour Organization, 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989', ILO, Geneva.

275 UNDP Learning For Nature: Courses (website, accessed 2022)

the Conservation of Nature, and the ICCA Consortium. This partnership includes training of local people in territorial mapping and demarcation to help resolve conflicts surrounding land use between groups living in an ICCA.[276]

Also worth noting are the results found in the area of 'empowering' indigenous peoples and local communities through the UNDP environment portfolio. In Ecuador, the Pro-Amazonia programme aimed to address deforestation and its causes and promote biodiversity, conservation and sustainable and integrated natural resource management in productive zones and bio-corridors. A comprehensive diagnosis of the gaps related to the situation of women in the Amazon was produced[277] and a leadership school trained 80 indigenous women who spoke highly of the project: *"New generations will know first-hand that there are opportunities [for] growth and to have a better life,"* according to one woman interviewee. There was also a good response from other organizations, who are keen to replicate the work.

However, it was suggested that UNDP could do a better job in identifying the particular needs of the communities and support them in key issues, such as certification and marketing opportunities. The Pro-Amazonia project also highlighted some of the difficulties involved in reaching and involving those furthest behind. The main limitation was language. Geographical distance was also an obstacle to reaching those left behind, given budget limitations and the additional costs required to reach scattered communities. In some cases, UNDP country office staff have difficulty physically reaching and communicating with local communities.

UNDP contributions to help 'enact' indigenous peoples' rights have been more mixed. The 'Equator Initiative' aims to bring increased visibility to nature-based indigenous and local solutions as a different trajectory for the planet. It recognizes between 10 and 20 new winners a year, providing them with a training 'bootcamp' on how to tell their story and positioning them in front of global audiences. As one winner put it, "The Equator Prize has enabled us to advance our work in the fight for environmental justice for the benefit of indigenous Pygmies and the establishment of a legal framework in their favour in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Currently the National Assembly has deemed admissible the law promoting and protecting indigenous Pygmies. A first in the DRC on the fundamental and specific rights of indigenous Pygmies."[278] Partners and winner organizations believe that the Equator Initiative is relevant and adds value to the current indigenous peoples and local communities discourse and nature-based solutions by providing recognition and legitimization of the work being done by these organizations.[279]

In India, the '1,000 Springs Initiative' trained local tribal youths as barefoot[280] para-hydrogeologists to map and rejuvenate natural springs by combining traditional and scientific knowledge. A GIS-based spring water atlas was developed, with an inventory of 554 springs in remote areas of Odisha state. Reportedly, a total of 135 tribal youths were trained as barefoot hydrologists.[281] The evaluation found that UNDP initiatives with the indigenous populations in India have improved capacities and opportunities for poor indigenous people. However, these initiatives are yet to be scaled up and replicated, either at the national level or in other states. Although the UNDP contribution is appreciated by the state government, UNDP is yet to help mainstream some of these learnings into larger government schemes.

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276 ICCA Consortium, 'Territories of Life: 2021 Report', ICCA Consortium 2021.

277 ProAmazonia, 'Diagnóstico de la Situación de las Mujeres Amazónicas', ProAmazonia, 2019.

278 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Equator Initiative Evaluation 2010-2019', UNDP, New York, 2020, p.15.

279 Ibid., p.18

280 Community members trained in hydrological principles and techniques, to act as links between the community and external actors.

281 UNDP independent evaluation, India.

The new service offer by the UNDP global policy network on 'local action' is a key opportunity to further the LNOB agenda, including on addressing overlapping and multiple forms of marginalization. The UNDP local action offer and accompanying hub propose three solutions: 1) Empowerment of indigenous peoples and local communities and the CSOs representing them, to strengthen governance and advocacy; 2) Resilience – support communities in building the socio-ecological resilience of their land/seascapes; and 3) Investment - transform financial and funding flows to communities to accelerate and sustain local collective action. The offer includes investments in the tools, capacities and financial resources to support the effective exercise of agency, and an adaptive management approach. While the current offer document does not mention LNOB specifically, it builds on the extensive and tested operational experience, national presence and organizational framework of the SGP, as well as other UNDP local initiatives. It is an attempt to counter the tendency of 'elite capture' by those NGOs who 'speak UNDP language' and capitalize on empowerment narrative, whereby people empower themselves by exercising their ability to visualize a future and to construct it themselves with UNDP support.

5.5 Signature Solution 5: Energy

The energy Signature Solution works on the 'enact' dimension by increasingly promoting gender-responsive approaches and integrating LNOB into national frameworks for climate change mitigation. UNDP is positioning itself to invest more heavily in initiatives to 'empower', through the 'moonshot' intent to help increase access to clean and affordable energy for 500 million people.

Finding 16 – Energy: The UNDP energy moonshot and contributions to enhanced energy access for rural populations, women, the elderly and the poorest of the poor are serving as a key avenue for reaching the furthest behind first. Gender equality has received improved attention, but intersecting vulnerabilities are not yet fully understood.

UNDP is clear in its commitment to increasing energy access for those furthest behind, especially through its Energy Compact, launched in 2021. The compact aims to increase access to clean and affordable energy for 500 million people by speeding up investment in distributed renewable energy solutions, especially for those hardest-to-reach and in crisis contexts.[282] Results are yet to become more evident and prove sustainability, but ongoing initiatives are geared towards benefitting left-behind populations. For example, youth have led initiatives to establish farms and rural enterprises with renewable energy and climate-smart technologies in the Dominican Republic.[283] In Egypt, UNDP projects installed biogas units in rural areas where women were standing in long queues to purchase butagas cylinders for cooking, during a period of political instability when there were severe shortages.[284] Through the project 'Grandmothers in Solar Energy', illiterate and elderly women were trained to become barefoot solar engineers in India, in order to build and maintain solar panels for their communities.[285] The work of UNDP in Yemen won an award for its engagement of women refugees in solar enterprises and serves as an example of development and gender perspectives that UNDP can bring to protracted conflict settings.[286] The installation of photovoltaic solar systems allowed the recovery and expansion of

[282] Energy Compact Summary (accessed 2022).

[283] UNDP independent evaluation, SGP.

[284] GEF and UNDP joint evaluation, Small Grants Programme.

[285] Barefoot College International (accessed 2022); GEF and UNDP joint evaluation, Small Grants Programme.

[286] UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Energy Access and Transition', UNDP, New York, 2021.

health and education services and of livelihoods in agriculture, food processing and clothing production. UNDP also supported a solar hybrid system that provided an uninterrupted power supply to the central COVID-19 isolation unit.[287]

In Moldova, UNDP contributed to enhanced energy access for rural populations, especially women, the elderly and the poor. Initially, the Moldova 'Energy and Biomass Project' focused on strengthening the country's energy security. It connected about 157,000 people to affordable heating, including the most left behind (e.g., children, elderly people, youth and PwDs).[288] In 2022, UNDP estimated that the increase in food and energy prices as a result of the war in Ukraine could translate into a jump from 11 to 21 percent of the country's population living in multidimensional poverty.[289] Under a new project, which sees collaboration across Signature Solutions 1 and 5, UNDP Moldova introduced targeted interventions to shield household welfare while being less harmful to the environment and public finances than general subsidies. Preliminary results from Moldova suggest that some forms of targeted temporary cash compensation in times of rapidly increasing energy prices can greatly benefit poorer households and are financially achievable.[290]

Community-level data showed that certain groups proved difficult for UNDP to engage, and certain energy hardware was prohibitively expensive to adopt without energy subsidies for those further behind. For example, youth were often not ready to participate in the labour market, and many were interested in migrating away from rural areas without energy. Small enterprise owners often did not have the resources to sustain energy costs without help, or to support implementation of UNDP initiatives. People with disabilities, people living with HIV and drug users were also difficult to engage, due to continuing stigma and absence of partner reach with these populations. In contrast, women-headed households, single mothers and other vulnerable women have proven easier to involve. It is noteworthy that several of the local implementing partners for energy access initiatives do not have experience with UNDP standards for the involvement of potentially left-behind populations and have requested training in this regard.

Most UNDP energy interventions that included a gender component in their design were too reliant on assumptions that women will automatically benefit through inclusion.[291] UNDP often targets women specifically to increase their access to energy, but has overlooked aspects of household decision-making over energy and budgeting, at times creating unintended consequences for female beneficiaries. In addition, women continue to face challenges in converting energy access and energy enterprises into changes to their economic status, often because initiatives failed to consider or address social norms regarding female livelihoods and financial control. Interventions combining energy with efforts on women's empowerment did not put enough emphasis on the factors that enable girls and women to invest in longer-term change, such as new livelihood development strategies or opportunities to influence the gender-based division of labour. For instance, interventions reinforced women's roles as unpaid carers by targeting women for clean energy cooking products and not involving men.

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287 Project Enhanced Rural Resilience In Yemen II; United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP's Solar Hybrid Solutions Result in More Robust Health Response in Seiyun', press release, UNDP, 13 January 2022, Seiyun.

288 UNDP independent evaluation, Moldova.

289 United Nations Development Programme, 'Addressing the Cost of Living Crisis in Developing Countries: Poverty and vulnerability projections and policy responses', UNDP, New York, 2022; United Nations Development Programme, 'The Energy Transition's Inverted U: Soaring energy prices, surging fossil-fuel subsidies and policy options', in Global Policy Network Brief, June 2022.

290 Ibid.; Project 'Addressing the impacts of the energy crisis in the Republic of Moldova: Initiating solutions toward energy security and energy poverty'.

291 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP support to energy access and transition.

UNDP is aware of the issue and has presented an energy and gender work plan to the newly-formed sustainable energy hub. The hub intends to coordinate with the digital, finance, gender and other teams to be able to deliver more effectively on solutions.[292] Despite its emphasis on LNOB and RFBF, there are currently no plans for the sustainable energy hub to focus on persons living with disabilities – a furthest-behind group already negatively affected by lack of access to energy and unclean cooking.[293]

In terms of upstream policy support, UNDP has had success in promoting the inclusion of gender into national frameworks for climate mitigation through its nationally-determined contributions (NDC) support programme, which has links to energy, photovoltaic systems and clean cooking. Such support provides a promising entry point to integrate LNOB. The agency's NDC support programme aids countries to eliminate barriers to a zero-carbon transition, in particular by formulating a systemic, integrated approach through governance and policy frameworks, inclusive leadership, transparency systems and blended climate finance.[294] Within the countries sampled for this evaluation, there was good evidence of success in integrating gender in NDC processes (e.g., in the Dominican Republic),[295] including through the provision of externally commissioned gender analyses (in Jordan and Uganda),[296] the development of action plans (Uganda) and community engagement (Ecuador, Peru).[297] In Ecuador, a gender guide was developed in conjunction with UN Women, and Ecuador was the first country where the NDC was presented following a participatory gender inclusion process. To strengthen the country's climate governance, a national meeting with 70 rural women was facilitated to exchange knowledge, establish alliances and learn about climate change mitigation initiatives. In Peru, the 'Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action' initiative had a very strong gender component. It developed a pilot energy school for women (e-Women), where women were trained on how to install, maintain and repair photovoltaic systems. This initiative was well received by local authorities and community organizations.

The UNDP energy Signature Solution – even when including climate mitigation activities – is relatively small, representing 1.9 percent of programmatic expenditure, with the smallest share of regular (core) resources of the Signature Solutions.[298] Funding remains one of the most significant challenges for country offices in the attempt to retain a stable energy portfolio or to integrate energy issues, and by extension LNOB, more deeply into their country programmes.[299]

5.6 Signature Solution 6: Gender equality

The gender Signature Solution has worked across the spectrum of 'examine', 'empower' and 'enact'. However, examining LNOB and the power relations between all genders (men, women, gender non-conforming), as well as intersections with other social identifiers (age, socio-economic status,

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292 Dutta, S., 'Gender Analysis of UNDP Energy Portfolio and a Framework for Action', UNDP, New York, April 2021.

293 IEO's energy access evaluation found that UNDP does not take sufficient measures to understand the experience of people with disability with energy, leaving a sizeable population reliant on energy access models that may be inappropriate for their circumstances.

294 United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP NDC Support Programme – Our Work', (accessed 2022).

295 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Assessment of Development Results: Dominican Republic', UNDP, New York, 2015.

296 United Nations Development Programme, 'Gender Equality and Climate Change in Jordan: Exploratory gender analysis', UNDP, Amman, 2021; Project Climate Change Resilience and DDR.

297 United Nations Development Programme, 'Gender Equality in National Climate Action: Towards a gender-responsive NDCs', UNDP, Quito, 2019; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Terminal Evaluation: National Appropriate Mitigation Actions Project (NAMA) in the sectors of energy generation and end use in Peru', UNDP, New York, 2021.

298 PoweBI Finance Dashboard, project finance data for 2018-2021, accessed May 2022.

299 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP support to energy access and transition.

ethnicity, etc.) has not been successfully promoted across the organization through Signature Solution 6, despite ongoing efforts. This speaks to a broader discomfort in the United Nations gender community as to the extent to which programming should focus on women, as opposed to having a broader LNOB/RFBF focus.

Finding 17 – Gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women: Despite relevant contributions to preventing and responding to gender-based violence, and to fighting structural barriers to women's empowerment, the link between UNDP gender programmes and LNOB has not been sufficiently conceptualized or documented. Intersectional approaches are emerging but were not found to be systematic across countries and work streams.

The evaluation of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, while noting some advances in conceptual clarity and gender mainstreaming in UNDP, concluded that "there is still limited attention to integrating gender to a level that could sustainably accelerate development results with transformative measures."[300] This evaluation confirmed a similar situation.[301] UNDP is struggling to promote gender analysis and a deeper level of integration of gender equality as a catalyst for the SDGs, despite sustained efforts and increased – though still insufficient – core resources devoted to this area.[302]

UNDP interventions in many instances strengthened institutional capacity of key government institutions in integrating a gender perspective, but there is a need to clarify the relationship between gender equality and LNOB. For example, the India ICPE found variability in design and reporting on gender-related results, while the Egypt ICPE noted that "UNDP has effectively mainstreamed gender across its interventions, though work is still needed to ensure that they 'leave no one behind' and align with the country's SDG priorities".[303]

A key vehicle for UNDP involvement in preventing and responding to gender-based violence is the Spotlight Initiative,[304] through which UNDP has contributed to positive results overall, with some attention to LNOB. The need to take a more intersectional approach and strengthen the LNOB focus was noted in the Nigeria and Uganda assessments.[305] In the evaluation focus countries that were not part of Spotlight, a more mixed picture was found. In Egypt, "some notable, albeit fragmented, results were found in combatting [gender-based violence] and violence against women".[306] In the Central African Republic, UNDP support for prevention of gender-based violence among women and children through

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300 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2022, pp.30, 31.

301 Information triangulated across the 15 countries and global/regional initiatives examined as part of this evaluation.

302 Gender Analysis is included amongst the UNDP programming quality standards and the Gender Equality Seal Matrix includes gender analysis in two of its benchmarks, with 82 Country Offices are currently participating in the Fourth Round of the Gender Seal (2021-2023). The Guides on Gender Analysis into CPD and on How to conduct Gender Analysis guidance for all staff include the intersectional approach, stressing that neither women nor men form a homogeneous group, and that gender relations intersect with many categories of social identities, such as religious, political affiliation, ethnicity, social status, age, and sexual orientation.

303 UNDP independent evaluation, India. pp.1, 46, 56. UNDP independent evaluation, Egypt, p.1.

304 A targeted programme on GBV, with 500 million euros provided by the EU, with programming in 25 countries.

305 Hera, 'Spotlight Mid-term Assessment Report: Nigeria', Hera, 2021, pp.35, 44; Hera, 'Spotlight Mid-term Assessment Report: Uganda', Hera, 2021, p.43. See also United Nations: 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective into all Policies and Programmes in the United Nations System', Report of the Secretary-General, ECOSOC, 2022.

306 UNDP independent evaluation, Egypt, p.41.

the 'mixed unit of rapid intervention' did not lead to enforced convictions, due to the weak governance and law enforcement structures in the country.[307] UNDP work on gender-based violence was deemed more effective in more stable contexts (Belarus, Madagascar, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan).[308]

The effect of COVID-19 on women led some country offices to quickly adapt programming to respond to heightened gender inequalities and increases in gender-based violence. UNDP also made substantial progress in integrating women's economic empowerment into its gender-based violence programmes. UNDP contributed to strengthening women's leadership and resilience by training them in traditionally male-dominated productive sectors and by integrating women survivors of gender-based violence into livelihoods programmes such as 'En Marcha Digital' in Ecuador.[309] However, there is not yet clarity on how many of those specific project-level initiatives will be scaled up or sustainable.

There were mixed results with regard to legal, policy and institutional reforms to fight structural barriers to women's empowerment. Removing structural barriers requires transformative change to gender inequality. In Regional Bureau for Arab States, progress towards the Muscat Declaration on gender justice[310] was assessed through original research on the 19 states in the Arab region, and governments, United Nations agencies and civil society were engaged in analysing it. A legislation 'traffic light' system enabled some new and different conversations with governments, expected to contribute to results improving gender justice.[311] However, there is limited evidence as to good practice and lessons learned, including which kinds of interventions are most likely to be successful in promoting transformative change.

Overall, triangulation of evidence found limited interconnection between interventions on gender equality and empowerment of women and those on LNOB. While the focus on inequality is essential to LNOB, it is important to not only compare women to men but also to consider inequalities amongst women (and men). The GES, 2018-2021 (the primary GES for the period under review), is focused on women, with almost no details on men who might be left behind; the GES 2022-2025 however has a greater focus on men. During consultations on the GES 2022-2025,[312] UNDP used the term "women in all their diversity", which signifies differences between women, while the final GES sticks to the term "all women". While the latter is in alignment with agreed Member State language in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the agreed language predates the focus on intersectionality currently being promoted.

The United Nations gender community, in which UNDP is both a leader and constructive collaborator, continues to grapple with how to align foundational international gender agreements with the intersectional LNOB/RFBF mandate. While intersecting and multiple marginalization is often not addressed through programming or clearly stated in strategy documents of the organization, many COs work around this with strategic partnerships, mainly with government but also with civil society and the private sector. Although gender analysis tools have been available for decades in UNDP, gender inequalities are still often not analysed in relation to other social, economic and political inequalities[313] and

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307 UNDP independent evaluation, CAR.

308 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2022

309 UNDP independent evaluation, Ecuador.

310 The Muscat Declaration outlines gender justice as both a process and an outcome, taking into consideration relevant international frameworks and national initiatives.

311 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2022.

312 UNDP Gender Equality Strategy, 2022-2025.

313 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'UNDP Support to Empowering Marginalized Groups', p.5.

there is still limited disaggregation and analysis in UNDP as to which women and other genders are being left behind. An illustration of this disjuncture is the 2019 Human Development Report: while this document can be commended for having a section that identifies those left furthest behind, it was not able to show disaggregated data by sex.[314]

There were some good practice examples which demonstrate and UNDP is able to incorporate LNOB programming in challenging contexts and to take intersectionality into account. One of the main lessons from this good practice is to find opportunistic entry points that are less controversial than programmes specific to certain groups, e.g., in contexts where the rights of some left behind groups are not recognized. For example, the work on health and HIV/AIDS programming was a useful entry point to reach persons with non-conforming sexual practices and gender identities.[315]

Finding 18 – Gender mainstreaming: Gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women has been increasingly mainstreamed in UNDP, and LNOB could benefit from the lessons learned through this process. The Gender Seal has been a major enabler. Resource allocation for gender mainstreaming has been consistently inadequate, which also affects the integration of LNOB.

Triangulated evidence from document review and key informant interviews revealed that there has been progressive improvement in gender mainstreaming since 2015 in UNDP. In UN-SWAP reporting for 2021, UNDP exceeded requirements for 13 of 16 indicators. This performance is superior to the average among the Funds and Programmes, which was seven.[316] UNDP was found to be responsive in addressing key challenges to mainstreaming gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women (GEWE) and sex-disaggregated data[317] and "made important strides in enhancing and refining its substantive policies, strategies and instruments to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment in its programming".[318] UNDP was also a key actor in inter-agency initiatives such as the UN-SWAP and the United Nations Country Team gender scorecard.

The 2021 MOPAN assessment also noted: "Although constrained by a lack of resources, the Gender Seal programme is a good example … with promising results in countries where country offices have actively engaged".[319] This was confirmed by triangulation of data for this evaluation, which recognized the Gender Seal as an important catalyst for change at country office level,[320] with more gender equitable work cultures, and stronger gender analysis and gender-responsive results.[321] However, the Gender Seal almost exclusively focuses on GEWE and gender mainstreaming. The August 2022 revision of its Comprehensive Benchmarking Matrix, 2021-2023 includes one indicator assessing intersectionality, Benchmark 3.7 ("CO has taken steps to promote an organizational culture of equality that addresses how

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314 United Nations Development Programme, 'Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century', Human Development Report 2019, UNDP, New York, 2019. The same report also has a section on GEWE with almost no reference to LNOB and RFBF and other intersectional identities (there is one reference to women in the poorest quintile).

315 UNDP, 'Inclusive Governance Initiative: Project Overview'. Launched by the health team in Africa, the initiative promotes an inclusive approach to sexual and gender diversity and advances the SDGs and Agenda 2063 in Sub-Saharan Africa across six countries.

316 Based on calculations provided by UN Women.

317 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

318 MOPAN assessment, 2021, p. 31.

319 Ibid.

320 United Nations Development Programme, 'Gender Equality Seal Assessment Final Report', UNDP, New York, 2017.

321 UNDP independent evaluation, UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2022. The evaluation notes this is because country offices awarded a Seal go through a multi-year process of gender audits, creating new processes for analysing gender, integrating gender into projects/programmes/policies, identifying partnerships, and knowledge management needs, and reporting on results.

gender intersects with multiple forms of discrimination"), which is a positive development.[322] The other non-gender indicator in the Seal promoting LNOB, Benchmark 6.1. ("CO has collaborated with a key line ministry (other than the women's machinery) on a substantive gender issue at least once in the current country programme") has been included with different wording for several years, and was found to be one of the poorer performing areas in the Gender Seal assessment.[323]

A key impediment to improved results in GEWE and LNOB is lack of funding. Findings from three thematic evaluations over the last 15 years demonstrate that UNDP performance in meeting its gender-related resource allocations have been consistently inadequate.[324] The Gender Equality Strategy, 2018-2021 included a commitment to allocate 15 percent of all country programme and project budgets to advancing gender equality and/or empowering women (Gender Marker 3).[325] Currently, funding allocation is some 8 percent. The 2022-2025 GES includes a commitment to progressively ensure that 70 percent of projects have gender equality as an important objective,[326] without specific timelines. In an effort to oversee the strengthening of gender mainstreaming, in 2008 UNDP set up a Gender Steering Implementation Committee (GSIC), chaired by the Administrator, with all senior managers as members. This was a pioneering initiative in the United Nations and is recognized as such in the UN-SWAP. GSIC meeting minutes and key stakeholder interviews demonstrated that the GSIC was useful for information exchange, but has not played a significant accountability role, in particular for ensuring UNDP meets its targets. This is an important lesson for LNOB integration: establishing a high-level structure does not necessarily ensure that a sufficient budget is assigned.

322 United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP-Gender-Seal-Comprehensive-Benchmarking-Matrix-2021-2023', UNDP 2022.

323 UNDP, 'Gender Equality Seal Assessment Final Report'. Previous wording was "CO had developed at least one gendered cross-practice initiative in the current CP".

324 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in UNDP', UNDP, New York, 2006; UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 'Evaluation of UNDP's Contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment', UNDP, New York, 2015; UNDP independent evaluation Strategic Plan 2018-2022, p.14.

325 UNDP Gender Equality Strategy, 2018-2021.

326 This includes those that aim contribute significantly (Gen 2) and that gender equality is the principal objective (GEN 3)

Chapter 6.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This section presents the key conclusions, recommendations and lessons from the evaluation.

6.1 Overarching formative conclusions

Based on the findings presented in the previous chapters, the evaluation draws the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1[327] **– Institutionalizing LNOB**: Some key pre-conditions for the good integration of LNOB are met by UNDP, with particular attention devoted to the promotion of equality and equity. Focus on non-discrimination is more limited.

There were several periods of heightened momentum that UNDP leveraged for the integration of LNOB: the initial conceptualization stage in 2017/2018, the COVID-19 response effort (with its socio-economic impact assessments detecting 'new poor' and left-behind populations) and the move towards anchoring LNOB in the 2022-2025 SP as a 'change direction'. There is some level of common understanding of LNOB (more limited at CO level), a cadre of motivated staff, and informal support mechanisms are in place. Despite these enablers, the organization has yet to sufficiently institutionalize LNOB, including through the allocation of adequate resources and the creation of lasting accountability structures and capacities. A coordinated operational approach including dedicated staff, knowledge-sharing mechanisms, regular tone-setting messaging from senior managers, adequate resources, incentives and accountability frameworks is still lacking. This is preventing more effective integration of LNOB and achievement of more visible results.

The LNOB field has been driven by well-intended and motivated staff rather than dedicated experts; programmatic 'how to' guidance is insufficient and staff lament capacity gaps due to lack of training. Financing for LNOB and RFBF has suffered the well-known challenges associated with projectized funding approaches, government co-funding requirements and shifting donor priorities. The evaluation observed the absence of LNOB considerations in existing planning and budgeting tools. For example, funding agreements and budgets did not include line items for LNOB. In sometimes inhospitable environments where government legislation may be at odds with internationally-agreed human rights conventions, and where government may be the primary donors, mixed messages from UNDP leadership at HQ, regional and country levels had a detrimental effect; UNDP has not always been able or effective in advocating against discrimination.

[327] Linked to Findings 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18; Lesson 3.

Conclusion 2[328] **– Conceptual clarity**: UNDP made important contributions to conceptual clarity on LNOB, notably through linking LNOB to inequality and intersectional pathways. Focus on reaching the furthest behind first has been more limited, despite this being a key part of the LNOB pledge.

UNDP conceptual work ("five-factor framework") adds clarity to the LNOB principles by emphasizing intersectional pathways. Through its conceptual and empirical work on multidimensional poverty, UNDP is linking LNOB to the broader debate around inequality – a useful addition to the human rights-based focus championed by United Nations agencies. While the UNDP take on LNOB is coherent with the expectations of the 2030 Agenda and aligned to its human development approach, the added value of the organization has not yet been clearly communicated. Internally, the five-factor framework has not yet trickled down to staff at the country level and is rarely used.

While the RFBF vision is in line with the organization's mandate and staff strongly identify with it, it does not figure in the strategic plan and other key documents and initiatives. The LNOB and RFBF principles, including intersectionality, have not yet been sufficiently translated into procedures – with the noteworthy exception of the environmental and social standards. At Signature Solution level, references to LNOB are mostly rhetorical and aspirational, and a group-by-group approach prevails, without proper attention to operationalizing an intersectional lens. The move towards a portfolio approach – aiming to move beyond a projectized approach and break down thematic siloes – is expected to bring greater cohesion over time, provided that an LNOB/RFBF lens can be strongly mainstreamed.

Conclusion 3[329] **– Programme performance in integrating LNOB**: UNDP programme performance in terms of making a difference to the lives of left-behind populations varied greatly, with best results found in longstanding areas of engagement that existed prior to the SDGs and LNOB. Initiatives did not usually put the furthest behind first.

While often making a difference to people's lives in the short term, most initiatives did not necessarily put the furthest behind first as promised, and effects have been of uncertain durability. Results were most evident in longstanding areas of engagement such as with women, indigenous peoples, youth and LGBTQI+ people. In most settings, 'leaving no one behind' was merely used rhetorically as a communication and advocacy tool, without noticeable programmatic implications or results. New programmatic impetus related to furthest-behind populations was visible in the areas of social protection and energy, but it was not possible to determine whether this additional attention was 'caused' by the introduction of the LNOB principles or not.

UNDP contributions have been pertinent in tackling issues of great importance to populations most left behind, but many challenges remain. Over the period examined, despite the introduction of LNOB language, no step-change was visible in how UNDP targets or interacts with left-behind populations, beyond what UNDP was already known to focus on. Yet it is notable that UNDP made progress in adapting to new challenges (e.g., COVID-19), despite its size, bureaucratic structure and longstanding relationships, which are inherently prone to path dependency. There was variation between country operations, largely dependent on leadership styles – with some indication of potential culture change towards more adaptive styles of management and greater attention to human rights concerns, driven by #NextGen leaders. In some settings, work at local and hyperlocal levels through decentralized partnership models was associated with effective adaptation and more inclusion and integration of LNOB principles.

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[328] Linked to Findings 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11; Lessons 1 and 2.

[329] Linked to Findings 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18; Lesson 2.

Conclusion 4[330] **– Contributing factors to LNOB integration**: Clarity of intent, leadership support and strong government and CSO engagement were the key factors contributing to more successful integration of LNOB principles into UNDP programmatic work.

Successful LNOB integration took place where UNDP was intentional about reaching the most left-behind sub-groups within targeted populations (such as rural women, people living below the poverty line who are also disabled, youth working in the informal economy, etc.) and about key intersections; where messaging was clear, accountability ensured and resources provided; where leadership was supportive, both internally and at national government level; and where partnerships with civil society were strong, including influence at the local level, to reach all levels of society.

Where government took ownership and accountability of initiatives to 'examine' or 'enact' LNOB principles, this has accelerated results achievement. Where government does not recognize the existence of certain populations likely to be left behind (ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+, etc.), UNDP has been conservative in speaking out against discrimination and sometimes self-censored the scope of its interventions.

Conclusion 5[331] **– Hindering factors to LNOB integration**: The key factors hindering LNOB integration were limited guidance and capacity to operationalize the principles, bias in strategic planning and project implementation, and a fragmented group-by-group and projectized approach to programming.

The fragmented nature of support provided by UNDP in-country, compartmentalizing populations into 'LNOB groups' tackled through different programmatic interventions and reported on through different channels and indicators, hampered integration and addressing intersectional linkages. Incomplete management for development results and static systems limited the agency's capacity to demonstrate results for the furthest behind. Other hindering factors included the persistent lack of data on populations at risk of being left behind, particularly in fragile contexts; inconsistent senior management communication, in particular with regard to addressing discrimination; and political and cultural barriers.

The link between identifying furthest-behind populations and effectively targeting them in programming was not automatic. There were gaps in strategic planning, and project implementation itself was often fraught with bias in beneficiary selection, further excluding some individuals and groups. Affected populations and the civil society organizations representing them lament the agency's often short-term engagements, which fail to make significant gains towards transformative change in the face of deep-rooted stigma, social norms and discrimination. There is a tendency to work with certain pre-approved NGOs, and this can lead to 'elite capture' by those who 'speak UNDP language' and hinder selecting alternative NGOs that are best for a particular task.

[330] Linked to Findings 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18; Lessons 3 and 4.

[331] Linked to Findings 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18; Lessons 4, 5 and 6.

6.2 Recommendations and Management Response

Based on the conclusions above, the evaluation puts forward the following interrelated recommendations. Given the formative nature of the evaluation and based on the consultative process with the evaluation learning group throughout the evaluation, more detailed and specific recommendations than usual are included for consideration and implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 1.[332]

Broaden the UNDP approach to leaving no one behind. UNDP should systematically adopt an "equality+" promise, including a stronger commitment to non-discrimination initiatives, and strengthen the architecture of its Signature Solution 1 to lead programmatic integration of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first.

Given the organization's niche in poverty eradication and inequality reduction – conceptually, in terms of metrics, and in programming – the organization should drive LNOB and RFBF integration through its work on inequality, multidimensional poverty and sustainable integrated finance. This will help elevate LNOB and RFBF beyond group-based approaches in favour of a greater focus on intersectionality when appropriate, and in favour of an explicit focus on equity and non-discrimination (the "+" in "equality+"). The "equality+" approach aligns with corporate 'moonshots' and priorities to help UNDP strengthen its thought leadership and strategic position in poverty eradication with an enhanced systemic approach to serve the poorest of the poor and reach the furthest behind first.

The "equality+" promise should include organization-wide efforts, with Signature Solution 1 (poverty and inequality) as its institutional anchor. It is now time for UNDP to wholeheartedly endorse this choice and create an appropriate support structure for it. At country level, the promise to "equality+" should include expertise and a systematic emphasis on engagement with left-behind groups in all their diversity, which is both an ethical mandate in the 2030 Agenda and a key factor in successful integrative interventions.

At HQ/regional bureau level, the support architecture for the "equality+" promise could include embedding a senior human rights advisor in the inclusive growth team and setting up a network of diversely skilled advisors/collaborators to promote adaptation and learning, with adequate resources allocated for coordination. Building on the evaluation learning group used for this formative evaluation, this group of advisors/collaborators should have clearly allocated time in their work plans and full management support. They should become the 'go to' people for LNOB advice for staff worldwide, and provide capacity development on issues related to LNOB and RFBF. This will avoid overburdening and competing for resources with the gender/human rights teams and architecture who might otherwise be the default – an issue observed in comparator organizations. Further, an accountability mechanism (e.g., 'friends' or 'champions' of leaving no one behind from among Member States), consistent messaging by senior management and cross-functional collaboration (in particular with the Sustainable Development Goal integration team and Accelerator Labs) need to accompany the integration process.

[332] Linked to Conclusions 1, 2, 3 and 5.

Recommendation 1. (cont'd)

Management response: Accepted

UNDP welcomes and **accepts** Recommendation 1 to strengthen UNDP positioning and institutional capacities on LNOB and especially on RFBF, with a greater focus on equity and non-discrimination interventions and further engagement with groups left or at risk of being left behind. UNDP will leverage the talent mapping of expertise led by OHR, as part of the People for 2030 strategy to strengthen integration of LNOB and RFBF, including intersectionality and anti-discrimination across the Signature Solutions of the strategic plans and related corporate substantive offers to deliver on the strategic plan moonshots. Bearing in mind that LNOB is a strategic direction that cuts across all solutions of the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, this will involve leveraging specialized expertise from across the BPPS/CB GPN at global, regional, and country level, including from BPPS SDG integration, Governance, Rule of Law, Security and Human Rights, Gender, Nature, Climate and Energy, Innovation/Accelerator Labs, and Effectiveness Group teams as well as the Crisis Bureau. UNDP will actively mobilize this internal pool of experts to nurture a community of practice on LNOB and RFBF and foster broad-based knowledge sharing and learning (as called for by Evaluation Recommendation 3).

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1. Leverage the talent mapping of expertise co-led by the GPN, the Bureau of Management (BMS), including the Office of Human Resources (OHR), as part of the People for 2030 strategy, to maximize on capacities to strengthen integration of LNOB and RFBF principles, including intersectionality and non-discrimination, across UNDP Signature Solutions and the moonshots.	Q2 2023	BPPS, CB, BMS, OHR		
1.2. Strengthen UNDP capacities for engagement on discrimination and intersectionality through the roll-out of the Leadership for Gender Equality Certificate.	Q4 2025	BPPS, BMS, OHR		

RECOMMENDATION 2.[333]

Turn commitment to reach the furthest behind first into action: UNDP should devise a clear implementation glide path operationalizing its commitment to supporting those furthest behind first.

Reaching the furthest behind first, the second half of the LNOB pledge made by the General Assembly, has received inadequate attention in UNDP, despite staff commitment. There is an opportunity for UNDP to demonstrate leadership in the United Nations system in this regard, given the organization's operational strength, local presence and mandate to serve the poorest of the poor. This should start with clearly articulating RFBF in United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks. Within the United Nations Country Team division of labour, UNDP should adopt an intentional focus on those furthest-behind populations that do not fall within the mandates of other agencies (and are perhaps less visible), such as the elderly and people with disabilities, in keeping with the UNDP focus on intersectionality.

Internally, UNDP should clarify financial requirements so as to appropriately budget and seek funding for an RFBF refocus, and assign responsibilities at the senior management level. This could include, for example, making RFBF a standing item on the expanded management meeting agenda to foster cross-cutting conversations and ringfence resources. At the regional hub level, UNDP should improve technical assistance for RFBF, for example by assessing capacities at the country office level to provide strategic leadership on LNOB and RFBF, and developing technical support mechanisms, especially for countries that have so far not been able to make significant strides towards integrating an LNOB lens.

An implementation glide path should clarify corporate responsibilities for promoting RFBF and the provision of adequate technical support – including for advocacy efforts at United Nations system-wide, regional and country levels to avoid diluting accountability. The expectation is that following the glide path will enable UNDP to lead on RFBF and play a strategic integrator role on LNOB. The glide path should put in place a clear accountability mechanism and concrete metrics, for example, by following the RACI model (responsible-accountable-consulted-informed).

This should include entries on:

- Rallying multi-level stakeholders, including donors and sister agencies, around an RFBF-centred approach that ensures robust and inclusive service delivery.
- Defining measures to tackle structural discrimination, harmful social norms, etc.
- Committing to supporting people and institutions in a participatory fashion, and to engaging civil society; updating job descriptions to reflect the "equality+" approach and RFBF focus in hiring, promotion and retention practices.
- Updating M&E frameworks at country level to ensure commitments will turn into action.

[333] Linked to Conclusions 1, 2 and 3.

Recommendation 2. (cont'd)

Management response: Accepted

UNDP **accepts** Recommendation 2 to further articulate its engagement on RFBF through the development of an 'operationalization glide path'. UNDP management envisions the management actions related to Recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the evaluation as defining components of this glide path and will institutionalize a dedicated inter-bureau mechanism for the systematic tracking and implementation of the glide path.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
2.1. Institutionalize an inter-bureau mechanism for the systematic tracking and implementation of the LNOB glide path comprising of the management actions relating to Recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.	Q3 2023	BPPS, CB, BERA, ExO		

RECOMMENDATION 3.[334]

Implement programming that responds to the need for leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. UNDP should curate and disseminate development solutions for the integration of both concepts for country-level staff and for different development settings through a resourced learning hub.

Building on the UNDP knowledge strategy and consultative processes, a resourced learning hub could be created to systematically share knowledge, lessons learned and success stories in relation to LNOB and RFBF programming and to develop and share tools and guidance to deal with constraints. To ensure uptake and evolution of the LNOB and RFBF learning hub, staff time should be dedicated for learning and skills development, including of partners. The learning hub could contain a 'LNOB and RFBF toolbox' in the shape of a resource website or other living document, publishing top lessons every so often. The toolbox could be curated to promote a context-specific approach and South-South learning, featuring interventions that exemplify proactive RFBF-focused designs with clear outcome-focused results capture mechanisms. Tools could provide separate information for each major development setting (upper-middle-income countries, lower-middle-income countries, least developed countries, fragile states, at a minimum), and demonstrate use of the examine-empower-enact framework. The toolbox will need to be practical and user-friendly, and tested with users during its development. It could include:

- Bias awareness-raising materials and training to foster dialogue about equity, equality and non-discrimination and why it is important for UNDP to address all three (this could be accompanied by training for staff and partners).

[334] Linked to Conclusions 2, 4 and 5.

- An overview of the UNDP niche and added value with regard to LNOB, explaining the equality+ approach and focus on reaching the furthest behind first.
- An approach to prioritization of populations likely to be left behind, and of the most apt interventions to support them (based on context and programme maturity and considering enablers for intersectionality).
- Examples of successful initiatives, followed by a discussion of enablers and entry points for LNOB integration, common challenges and pitfalls (by programmatic context and with specific attention to challenging national environments).
- Examples showing the operationalization of LNOB theories of change at the portfolio level, also demonstrating how cross-cutting issues are mainstreamed.

Management response: Accepted

UNDP **accepts** Recommendation 3 to foster share knowledge, lessons learned and good practices in relation to LNOB and RFBF by leveraging UNDP's collaboration platform, SparkBlue, which since June 2020 has brought together 8000+ UNDP personnel and 15,000+ external practitioners, connecting United Nations staff with external expertise and creating spaces for internal and external peer learning. Through SparkBlue, communities of practice are fostering strong substantive and collaborative engagement via the power of the network to activate collective intelligence, foster networked learning and co-create timely, integrated solutions. They will serve as the learning hub on LNOB and RFBF and continue to generate and disseminate knowledge and know-how within UNDP and widely within the United Nations development system. The communities of practice will empower country-level staff and the wider development community to think out loud, learn from each other, connect, collaborate, and co-create and to support country offices' programmatic activities.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
3.1. Foster a community of practice, as part of the UNDP knowledge management strategy, on LNOB/RFBF to offer curated knowledge, tools and other resources, and internal and external peer learning to strengthen and systematize LNOB-RFBF-based programming.	Q2 2023	BPPS (in collaboration with CB, regional bureaux)		

RECOMMENDATION 4.[335]

Engage non-governmental actors as partners: UNDP should strengthen its engagement with civil society organizations and private sector partners and build their capacity to advance the agenda for leaving no one behind. This should go beyond project-based, contractual and funding relationships and move towards a partnership model, which is particularly important to reaching the furthest behind.

To enhance its chances of truly reaching the furthest behind first or the most likely to be left behind, UNDP should work with non-governmental actors in diverse dimensions, such as service delivery to those not otherwise reached, motivating civic engagement, defending and advocating for citizens' rights and for upholding or changing social norms, and civil monitoring to hold government accountable. In particular, UNDP should further support capacity development and empowerment of civil society, with particular focus on LNOB and RFBF, including at the local and community levels, avoiding elite capture and lopsided approaches that instrumentalize CSOs as mere project implementers. Together with left-behind populations, UNDP and partners can better capitalize on non-government actors as active agents in their communities' transformative changes and development.

UNDP should more systematically link CSOs with its programming with government partners whenever possible, including when identifying, planning/designing, implementing and evaluating LNOB-related initiatives. The aim should be building sustainable and collaborative partnerships with CSOs to accompany long-term social change, with less focus on short-term funding and project delivery. The UNDP group of LNOB advisors/collaborators should engage with the process of revising the UNDP civil society strategy and defining the UNDP local action offer, to ensure a strong focus on LNOB and RFBF. The process could also clarify how UNDP can best support civil society in volatile contexts and the extent to which UNDP should (or should not) work at hyperlocal level, given its mandate and niche.

Management response: Accepted

UNDP **accepts** Recommendation 4. UNDP will renew its efforts to utilize its convening power, technical capacity and partnership networks to promote the meaningful participation of civil society actors in public life, with a strong focus on removing barriers preventing the meaningful participation of specific population groups as well as strengthening the capacity of civil society actors representing those furthest behind. UNDP will continue to amplify formal and informal partnerships with civil society, including activists, youth groups, volunteers, indigenous peoples and NGOs in our work of advocating for the achievement of the SDGs and our commitment to leaving no one behind. Furthermore, UNDP will more systematically involve women's organizations and other groups advocating for rights in dialogues with national and international institutions. UNDP will also continue to dedicate efforts to engage the private sector in the LNOB agenda, bringing more efficiency and innovation to help governments better serve those left behind.

[335] Linked to Conclusion 4.

Recommendation 4. (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
4.1. Develop dedicated policy and programme guidance to support implementation of the governance global programme, supported by dedicated advisory capacity, with a strong focus on nurturing civic space and ensuring equality of opportunities for participation in the public sphere, especially for population groups historically experiencing marginalization and disadvantage.	Q2 2023	BPPS, CB, regional bureaux		
4.2. Develop and roll out strategy to further strengthen youth advisory groups, sounding boards and platforms to meaningfully engage young people in partnership-building and policy and programme support.	Q2 2023	BPPS, CB, regional bureaux, BERA		
4.3. Develop and amplify existing civil society partnership platforms to empower remote and hard-to-reach local actors as active agents in social transformation, including through a review of operational modalities to support CSOs beyond a limited service-provision role in project implementation.	Q3 2023	BPPS, CB, BERA		
4.4. Develop tools and guidance under the Inclusive Innovation Journey to advance private sector engagement on LNOB.	Q2 2023	BPPS, CB, BERA		

RECOMMENDATION 5.[336]

Deliberately fund programmatic integration of leaving no one behind. When allocating regular resources and negotiating cost sharing, UNDP should strategically consider reaching the furthest behind principles and country scores on the corresponding corporate marker. Resource mobilization strategies should specifically clarify the UNDP value proposition for reaching the furthest behind first and the cost of inaction.

A budget line for LNOB and RFBF integration and related monitoring and evaluation should be systematically included in large-scale donor agreements, pooled funding and funding windows, in particular for humanitarian/recovery financing. Particularly for pooled resources and funding windows, where UNDP is a fund manager, it should build a stronger LNOB lens into the application process, asking candidates to clarify how those left behind are targeted and structural issues addressed. This model should be promoted and followed by other United Nations pooled funding mechanisms.

In allocating core resources, UNDP should advance its discussion with the Executive Board to implement what has been committed in management responses to two past IEO evaluations by the organization – i.e., to reform the allocation formula of core resources to go beyond gross domestic product and consider country-level inequality indicators in funding decisions. In addition, UNDP should further detail to country offices how climate finance and COVID-19 recovery finance can provide strategic entry points for better funding and integration of LNOB issues at the structural level. This would involve clarifying what role UNDP could play in any given country context and allocating sufficient resources to supporting those left behind.

To support advocacy and resource mobilization on RFBF, UNDP should commission and broadly disseminate research on the importance of RFBF and the costs of inaction (the cost of not reaching the furthest behind, for society and the planet), systematically engaging during this research with populations left furthest behind. This should be accompanied by a business case on social return on investment for RFBF. Results should be communicated to donors along with clarity on the UNDP value proposition, supported by evidence of past performance. This approach should help convince donors about why they should be investing in RFBF and why with UNDP.

[336] Linked to Conclusions 1 and 4.

Recommendation 5. (cont'd)

Management response: Accepted

UNDP **accepts** Recommendation 5. UNDP recognizes the centrality of LNOB and RFBF as key principles in its Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. UNDP shares the concern that the GDP-based allocation criteria for core funding fall short of the reality on the ground. UNDP will explore the criteria for allocation of regular resources to better align with countries' development needs and LNOB principles, going beyond GDP-based criteria. The corporate resource mobilization strategy currently under development aims to clearly articulate the UNDP value proposition in line with the strategic plan to key audience groups and leverage the various strategies, engagement plans and institutional capabilities for advocacy, partnership and fundraising. By countering the current difficult and restricted funding practice, the strategy will help mobilize adequate and flexible funding, which in turn enables UNDP to strategically allocate resources to underfunded areas and mandates, including the LNOB agenda.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
5.1. The mid-term review of the strategic plan will offer the opportunity to explore the criteria for allocation of regular resources to better align with programme countries, to better target those left behind.	Q3 2023	BERA, BMS, BPPS		
5.2. Develop the corporate resource mobilization strategy to secure adequate, flexible and predictable funding to enable UNDP to have the means to deliver on its mandate, including the LNOB agenda.	Q4 2022	BERA	Ongoing	
5.3. Integrate LNOB and RFBF in external engagement plan and advocacy campaigns.	Q2 2023	BERA		

RECOMMENDATION 6.[337]

Update metrics and learning for leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first: UNDP should invest in more holistic corporate-level metrics and learning for LNOB and RFBF that highlight the perspectives of those furthest behind, demonstrate a systems-thinking approach and strategically consider intersectionality.

UNDP should explore how to better use its corporate planning, monitoring and evaluation systems around measuring impact – in particular, to track the change UNDP programmes achieve in the lives of people, especially those left behind, for enlarged freedoms and opportunities and improved well-being. This would require UNDP systems to devote additional attention to LNOB and RFBF (considering intersectionality when appropriate) for improved reporting, learning and adaptive management, and to allow the organization to demonstrate impact on lived experiences.

Traditional corporate results frameworks and systems usually provide aggregate quantitative information, without sufficient attention to quality, contexts and coverage of results, progress over time and failure to advance. To face 21st Century development challenges and contribute to transformational change, UNDP needs to be able to credibly measure and report on impact and put the perspectives of those left behind at the centre of managing for development results, e.g., through consistent engagement of left-behind populations during the programme cycle, including monitoring. As UNDP continues to refine its integrated resources and results framework, it should focus greater attention on LNOB and RFBF. UNDP should also ensure improved attention to lesson-learning on LNOB integration by embedding LNOB and RFBF in its new knowledge strategy.

As part of this corporate results framework and systems overhaul, the LNOB marker should be revised and improved, aligning it more closely with the five-factor framework, reflecting greater complexity of identities and building on lessons learned from the gender marker. The marker should go beyond tagging the project output level to consider what is most important in achieving the anticipated impact for different people with understanding of intersectionalities – for example, a training for parliamentarians on disability inclusion should be tagged as "discrimination" and "persons with disabilities". The LNOB marker should be linkable with expenditures (similar to the gender marker) and above all align with improved disaggregated performance indicators for tracking of results at the outcome and impact levels. If the accuracy of the marker improves, the tool can in time be used to inform LNOB commitment and spending. Clearer guidance and training on how to assign tags, including on the degree of engagement with different potentially left-behind populations, should accompany the marker. Country offices should tag for intersectionality when appropriate, with a clearer understanding of its rationale and impact, thus boosting the utility of the marker. Most importantly, the marker tagging should be more rigorously checked and frequently revised to ensure it is indeed mirrored in planning and implementation, in portfolio, programme and project metrics, and in all evaluative assessments.

[337] Linked to Conclusion 5.

Recommendation 6. (cont'd)

Management response: Accepted

UNDP **accepts** Recommendation 6 and acknowledges the need for more holistic metrics and learning with specific focus on intersectionality of left-behind groups in its programming. Work is already underway to significantly improve the LNOB marker and its metrics by incorporating an intersectionality function in Quantum, which is expected to go live in January 2023. UNDP is currently rolling out the portfolio initiation framework (PIF) to integrate portfolio approaches in programme and project management policies and procedures with the objective of promoting dynamic and holistic approaches to managing development interventions to achieve systemic change. The PIF will be tested in 40+ pilot country offices to operationalize the programme in addition to projects and to provide additional metrics to lift the quality assurance guidance on LNOB. The organization's project quality assurance standards and systems will be revised, as part of the UNDP RBM update, to improve targeting and measuring impact to advance the UNDP LNOB/RFBF agenda. UNDP will conduct impact and portfolio evaluations of UNDP programmes, upon the availability of guidelines, which will credibly help measure, report and demonstrate impact from UNDP support in the lives of people, especially those left behind.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
6.1. Update the LNOB marker to enable intersectionality analysis of LNOB groups, including a guidance note and training on the use of the new marker.	Q3 2023	BPPS, CB, BMS	Ongoing	
6.2. Integrate portfolio approaches in UNDP programme and project management policies and procedures to promote dynamic and holistic approaches to managing development interventions to achieve systemic change. Roll out the portfolio approach through the portfolio initiation framework in 40+ pilot country offices to operationalize the programme in addition to projects and to provide additional metrics to lift the quality assurance guidance on LNOB.	Q4 2023	BPPS	Ongoing	

Recommendation 6. (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
6.3. Update the UNDP project quality assurance standards and systems, as part of the UNDP RBM update, to improve targeting and measuring impact to advance the organization's LNOB and RFBF programming principle.	Q4, 2023	BPPS		
6.4. Conduct impact and portfolio evaluations of UNDP programmes, upon the availability of guidelines, to help measure, report and demonstrate impact from UNDP support, in the lives of people, especially those left behind.	Q4 2023	BPPS		

* The implementation status is tracked in the Evaluation Resource Centre.
** BPPS = Bureau for Policy and Programme Support; CB = Crisis Bureau; BMS = Bureau of Management Services; BERA = Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy; EXO =Executive Office; OHR = Office of Human Resources

6.3 Lessons

These lessons were mostly derived from the comparator organizations study commissioned as part of this evaluation and from 35 years of gender mainstreaming efforts in UNDP.

Lesson 1. Comparator organizations with different mandates and scopes of work went through internal consultative processes to define how to best to integrate LNOB principles. In all successful cases, conceptual clarity has been key for operationalization and implementation of LNOB organizational strategies and to reach common understanding. Organization-wide consultations have helped debunk myths, reach shared definitions, assess knowledge gaps, identify needs and priorities at different levels and clarify responsibilities.[338]

Lesson 2. There is no 'one size fits all' for translating organizational commitments into effective programming for LNOB. In some comparator organizations, practical tools were developed to enable country-level staff to analyse their specific environments, determine the most feasible LNOB approaches, and select the right areas, groups and entry points to focus on (i.e., GIZ, UNFPA, and UNICEF). These can serve as inspiration to UNDP, in particular with regard to selecting priority populations. Further, continuous and tailored training and capacity development of personnel was seen as key to appropriate execution.[339]

[338] Linked to Findings 5 and 6.

[339] Linked to Findings 5, 6 and 8.

Lesson 3. Simply elevating LNOB in strategic documents will not necessarily lead to organizational focus and resource allocation. UNDP has included an outcome/Signature Solution on GEWE in its strategic plans since 2014, along with an accompanying gender strategy that is reported to the Executive Board. These strategic steps have increased awareness and action on gender issues, even as this evaluation has emphasized the need for aspirations to be matched by practical implementation. Signaling LNOB as constituting a directional change, as indicated in the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, does not automatically guarantee sufficient organizational focus or adequate resources.[340]

Lesson 4. A group-by-group approach alone is neither practical nor efficient, as it creates overlapping accountabilities, is open-ended (ever more groups can be added) and neglects intersectionalities. Developing strategies for specific LNOB areas and groups can support conceptual clarity and short-term results, but this may fail to lead to sustainable organizational support, particularly where there is inadequate accountability for follow-up and allocation of resources. For example, the potential for adequate financial allocation to disability rights, indigenous peoples, and LGBTQI+ persons, on which there has only recently been focus, is not promising within UNDP and elsewhere. An intersectional lens open to mobilizing resources from multiple angles seems to deliver better results.[341]

Lesson 5. A change in mindset requires staff diversity, leaders and a common understanding of why LNOB and RFBF are central. All comparator organizations reviewed stressed that a mindset shift within their organizations and partners is seen as essential to strengthening LNOB and RFBF integration. Some ingredients quoted as potential success factors are a less hierarchical structure and atmosphere; leadership commitment; an organizational culture more open to creativity and less focused on achieving pre-determined results, compliance and bureaucratic regulations; staffing that in itself is more diverse; and common understanding between the entity and its partners on why LNOB and RFBF work is central to achieving its mandate and concrete results.[342]

Lesson 6. Obtaining and using data are critical for identifying those left behind and for relevance and effectiveness of interventions. Credible and accurate disaggregated data, both quantitative and qualitative, official and community-driven, are considered key for identifying those left behind and their needs and priorities, for designing appropriate (holistic and intersectional) interventions/initiatives, for monitoring progress and results, for evaluating outcomes and impact, and for credibly reporting on performance. Ensuring that the necessary data are generated also requires a nuanced understanding of the aspects on which data are needed in a given context.[343]

[340] Linked to Finding 18.

[341] Linked to Findings 3, 6 and 8.

[342] Linked to Findings 5, 7,9 and 10.

[343] Linked to Findings 10 and 11.

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the IEO at:
https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/13687

Annex 1. Evaluation terms of reference

Annex 2. Theories of change

Annex 3. Country case selection

Annex 4. Process tracing – methodology and evidence

Annex 5. LNOB marker – contextual figures

Annex 6. Documents consulted

Annex 7. Stakeholders consulted

Annex 8. Ethical review approval

Annex 9. Evaluation learning group TOR

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