



Independent  
Evaluation  
Office

United Nations Development Programme

# INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION PARAGUAY





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responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
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# FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the third Independent Country Programme Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the Republic of Paraguay. The evaluation was conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, and covered the programme period 2020-2023.

The evaluation examined the programmatic performance of UNDP, including factors that enabled or hindered its results. The evaluation also provided an opportunity to reflect on the UNDP assistance strategy to an upper-middle-income country with high human development - such as Paraguay - in which international assistance is limited and complex development challenges, such as social inequality and vulnerability to climate change, are still prominent.

Paraguay enjoyed decades of economic growth and reduction in poverty, but the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of various extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, prevented the country from maintaining this upward development trend. UNDP aimed to contribute to the National Development Plan Paraguay 2030 (PND 2030) by promoting access to universal quality services, social protection and care; facilitating inclusive economic growth; strengthening institutional capacity for natural capital management; and supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and PND 2030.

The evaluation found that various national and international development actors recognize UNDP as a partner that promotes institutional strengthening and brings efficiency to public policy management, with the capacity to adapt to emerging challenges and promote innovation. UNDP has played a relevant role in fostering evidence-based decision-making, supporting the country to meet its international commitments, particularly in the area of the environment, and promoting gender equity and women's empowerment.

Moving forward, UNDP Paraguay should enhance its partnerships and programmatic resources to promote results-based management, focusing on impacting the most vulnerable groups. It should provide a systematic approach to poverty reduction and socioeconomic development in Paraguay. UNDP should strengthen resilience and food security in the face of climate change, and continue to promote the prevention of violence against women, and their economic empowerment and political participation.

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



**Isabelle Mercier**  
**Director**  
**Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP**

# CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	v
EVALUATION BRIEF	1
<b>CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation	4
1.2 Evaluation methodology	4
1.3 Country context	6
1.4 UNDP programme under review	8
<b>CHAPTER 2. FINDINGS</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Strategic positioning and partnerships	12
2.2 Outcome 1: Universal services, social protection and care	14
2.3 Outcome 2: Inclusive economic growth	17
2.4 Outcome 3: Natural capital management	19
2.5 Outcome 4: Efficient public services	26
2.6 Cross-cutting areas	33
<b>CHAPTER 3. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 Conclusions	42
3.2 Recommendations and management response	45
<b>ANNEXES</b>	<b>49</b>

## FIGURES

<b>Figure 1.</b> Programme expenditure by thematic area, 2020-2023	1
<b>Figure 2.</b> Country programme funding sources, 2020-2023	1
<b>Figure 3.</b> Selected set of socioeconomic indicators	7
<b>Figure 4.</b> Selected set of gender equality indicators	7
<b>Figure 5.</b> Selected set of environmental indicators	8
<b>Figure 6.</b> Alignment and key objectives of the UNDP CPD Paraguay 2020–2024	9
<b>Figure 7.</b> Budget and expenditure 2020–2023 by outcome	
<b>Figure 8.</b> Expenditure by fund category for overall programme (2020–2023)	10
<b>Figure 9.</b> Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 1	14
<b>Figure 10.</b> Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 1	14
<b>Figure 11.</b> Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 2	17
<b>Figure 12.</b> Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 2	17
<b>Figure 13.</b> Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 3	20
<b>Figure 14.</b> Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 3	20
<b>Figure 15.</b> Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 4	27
<b>Figure 16.</b> Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 4	27
<b>Figure 17.</b> Number of projects by gender marker and outcome, 2020–2023	36
<b>Figure 18.</b> Expenditure by gender marker in million US\$, 2020–2023	36

## BOXES

<b>Box 1.</b> Evaluation questions	4
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## MAPS

<b>Map 1.</b> Population density versus urban land-use plans developed	25
<b>Map 2.</b> Distribution of solidarity initiatives of the Wendá platform	33

## TABLES

<b>Table 1.</b> Forest cover change in the western region: Hectares of native forest loss 2018-2022	23
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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AMA</b>	Asunción Metropolitan Area
<b>CONACYT</b>	National Council of Science and Technology
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease 2019
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>DIM</b>	Direct implementation modality
<b>ENI</b>	National Innovation Strategy
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gas
<b>GRES</b>	Gender Results Effectiveness Scale
<b>ICPE</b>	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
<b>IEO</b>	Independent Evaluation Office
<b>IFI</b>	International financial institution
<b>INDERT</b>	National Institute for Rural Development and Land
<b>INFONA</b>	National Forestry Institute
<b>MADES</b>	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
<b>MAG</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
<b>MDS</b>	Ministry of Social Development
<b>MoF</b>	Ministry of Finance
<b>MoFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MoIC</b>	Ministry of Industry and Commerce
<b>MPWC</b>	Ministry of Public Works and Communication
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprise
<b>MTESS</b>	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security
<b>NAMA</b>	Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action
<b>NDP 2030</b>	National Development Plan Paraguay 2030
<b>NIM</b>	National implementation modality
<b>POUT</b>	Urban land-use plan

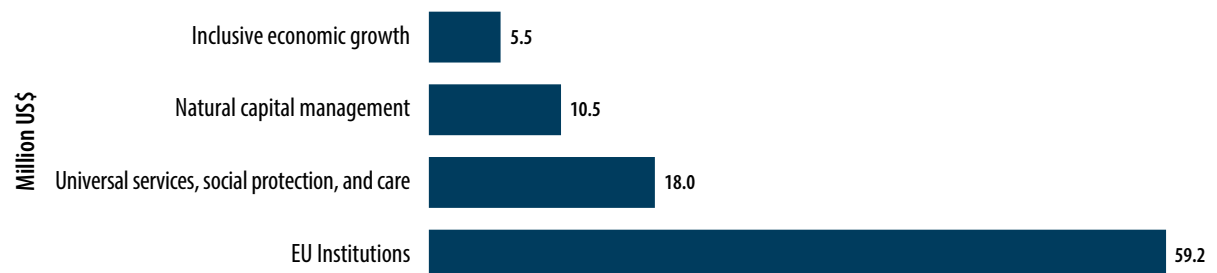
<b>RBLAC</b>	Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>SCJ</b>	Supreme Court of Justice
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SENAC</b>	National Anti-Corruption Secretariat
<b>SGP</b>	Small Grants Programme
<b>SIIS</b>	Integrated Social Information System
<b>SIMORE</b>	System for Monitoring International Recommendations on Human Rights and Sustainable Development
<b>SNC</b>	National Land Registry Service
<b>STP</b>	Technical Secretariat of Planning
<b>SPS</b>	Social protection system
<b>TSJE</b>	Superior Court of Electoral Justice
<b>UNAIDS</b>	United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>VNR</b>	Voluntary National Review

# Evaluation Brief: Paraguay

Paraguay has an upper-middle-income economy, historically linked to agriculture and the exploitation of its natural resources. Sound macroeconomic policies and sustained economic growth have reduced poverty in recent decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic and various natural disasters have slowed this trend. The country faces strategic challenges, such as reducing economic inequality, improving the quality of employment and social protection, promoting gender equity and access to justice, protecting its ecosystems and strengthening resilience to climate change.

The UNDP country programme 2020-2024 sought to leverage the organization's recognized strengths, such as its capacity for technical and operational support for public policy implementation and its capacity for technical assistance to institutional strengthening, to contribute to the priorities established in the National Development Plan Paraguay 2030 (PND 2030). Implementation was structured around four outcomes: i) improving access to universal quality services, social protection and care; ii) generating inclusive economic growth; iii) strengthening natural capital management; and iv) efficient public services through institutional capacity-building and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and PND 2030.

**FIGURE 1. Programme expenditure by thematic area, 2020-2023**



**FIGURE 2. Country programme funding sources, 2020-2023**



## Findings and conclusions

The evaluation shows that UNDP has remained a trusted partner of Paraguay, standing out for its adaptability, management efficiency and commitment to innovation. UNDP added value to its programme by adapting with agility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and incorporating the Acceleration Lab to drive digitalization and public and social innovation.

UNDP provided valuable support in the areas of social protection and economic development, but was limited in its ability to reach the most vulnerable people. The emphasis of its programme was on institutional strengthening through support to information systems and knowledge products, which facilitated the

promotion of evidence-based decision-making. Various national institutions and programmes, such as the programme for older people, for example, clearly benefited from this collaboration.

UNDP provided support for institutional strengthening to the executive, judicial and electoral branches of government. Its contribution to the expansion of justice facilities in the country was highlighted. Likewise, the evaluation points to UNDP promotion of best practices in gender equity in various public institutions, within a challenging context, with attention to the different needs of women in areas such as security, political and economic empowerment, and the fight against violence against women.

UNDP also contributed to the promotion of sustainable production, biodiversity protection and urban sustainability. The programme supported Paraguay to comply with its international obligations by strengthening institutions such as the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development or the National Forestry Institute. It also helped to formulate several urban territorial development plans and promoted multisectoral platforms for sustainable meat and soybean production. However, programme implementation also experienced the challenges that persist as a result of the country's vulnerability to climate change.

## Recommendations

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

**Recommendation 1.** Based on the rich historical collaboration with state institutions in Paraguay, UNDP should focus its strategies and resources on results with greater impact. UNDP should help to ensure that institutional strengthening translates into positive changes in the lives of the most vulnerable. Partnerships and programmatic resources should drive results-based management and communication for development, to enable full national ownership of initiatives and contribute to paradigm shifts among key stakeholders. UNDP should continue to diversify its cooperation framework, expand its added value and minimize risks.

**Recommendation 2.** UNDP should promote a systemic approach to poverty reduction and socioeconomic development. This should facilitate and strengthen synergy with other areas of the programme and promote integration between relevant public institutions, other agencies of the United Nations system, the private sector and international financial institutions. The UNDP focus should be on expanding coverage and improving the quality of programmes implemented with key institutions responsible for serving the most vulnerable populations. Innovation resources should be cross-cutting and integrated, to add value to the programme as a whole.

**Recommendation 3.** In the design of the next environment and climate portfolio, the areas of access to water, disaster risk reduction, resilience and food security for vulnerable communities should be integrated as cross-cutting elements. The promotion of sustainable production through multisectoral dialogue spaces should be reinforced, and complemented with broader initiatives for forest conservation, protection and the creation of protected areas. UNDP should continue to promote low-emission development and access to climate finance.

**Recommendation 4.** In the design of the next programme, UNDP should strengthen its approaches to equality between women and men to drive further progress and generate and promote evidence-based information. It should continue to promote change in the areas of economic and political empowerment of women and the prevention of violence against women. It should integrate a stronger human rights-based approach, focused on building citizenship for the exercise of rights, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable groups.

# CHAPTER 1

# BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. The purpose of an ICPE is twofold: to strengthen UNDP accountability to national stakeholders and its Executive Board, and to promote evidence-based learning to feed into the development of the next country programme. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.<sup>1</sup>

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### BOX 1. Evaluation questions

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

This is the third country-level evaluation conducted by IEO in the Republic of Paraguay.<sup>2</sup> This ICPE covers UNDP work implemented under the umbrella of the 2020-2024 Country Programme Document (CPD), up to June 2023. The scope of the ICPE includes the UNDP programme in its entirety, from all funding sources including UNDP regular resources, donors and the Government of Paraguay. The ICPE also considers interventions that started in the previous programme cycle and have continued into the current one, as per the evaluation terms of reference (Annex 1).

The ICPE is guided by four main evaluation questions (Box 1). The evaluation presents findings, conclusions and recommendations and will serve as an input into the development of the next UNDP CPD for Paraguay. The primary audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Paraguay country office, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC), and Executive Board, and the Government of Paraguay. The evaluation is also expected to be used by other United Nations agencies and development stakeholders in the country as an input to their own evaluation work.

## 1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process and methodology (see full evaluation framework in Annex 2) and adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.<sup>3</sup> At the start of the evaluation, the team (together with the UNDP country office) identified and validated the list of all the projects within the programme cycle which would form the basis for the analysis (see the complete project list in Annex 5). This was followed by a desk review of reference material, including country programme strategies, project and programme documents, monitoring reports, audits and evaluations (see Annex 4 for the full list), and a stakeholder analysis was carried out. The evaluation sought balanced

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

<sup>2</sup> The IEO conducted an Assessment of Development Results in 2012 and its first ICPE in 2018. See both documents here: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/paraguay.shtml>.

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

representation of the different types of actors involved in the programme, including government officials, implementing partners, beneficiary groups, United Nations agencies, and development partners from donor organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia.

The evaluation employed a rating system to assess the performance of the country programme, using the five internationally agreed evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability (OECD-DAC, 2020).<sup>4</sup> The relevance and coherence of the UNDP country programme were assessed in relation to key national development policies and strategies, changes in the national context and the interventions of other international actors in the country. UNDP capacity to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities was also considered. The effectiveness of the programme was analysed through an assessment of progress towards expected outputs, and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the intended CPD outcomes. Efficiency assessed the extent to which results were obtained in an economic and timely manner. Sustainability assessed the likelihood of net benefits continuing after the interventions are concluded. The ICPE examined specific factors that have influenced the programme, both positively and negatively, across all criteria. The country programme performance rating results can be found in Annex 7.

The evaluation relied on information collected from different sources, triangulated before the final analysis. These included:

- A review of key country context data (see Annex 3) and UNDP documentation on projects and programmes in Paraguay, audit reports, decentralized evaluations, research papers and other available country-related publications.<sup>5</sup>
- A comprehensive presentation of the results of the programme cycle by the UNDP country office, discussed at the beginning of the field mission and cross-checked during the interviews. Field visits were conducted in Paraguari, Itapua and Neembucu; Guaira and Misiones; and Presidente Hayes and Boqueron in El Chaco.
- An analysis of the programme outcomes and outputs, the status of its indicators (see Annex 6), and the underlying theories of change, and a mapping of implemented projects against the goals set in the CPD. Geographical Information System analysis complemented the data collection (see Annex 8).
- A total of 141 stakeholders of the programme were interviewed, including 71 women. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders. Focus groups were conducted with beneficiaries. They enabled the team to collect data, assess perceptions on the scope and effectiveness of programme interventions, determine factors affecting performance, and identify programme strengths and weaknesses.

In line with UNDP Gender Equality Strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming across the country programme and operations. UNDP gender markers enabled the evaluation to track resource allocations for gender equality in the programme. The IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) was used to implement a gender responsive analysis of programme results.<sup>6</sup> Where available, sex-disaggregated data were collected and assessed against programme outcomes.

<sup>4</sup> The UNDP IEO rating system is available at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/ratingsystem.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup> 11 decentralised evaluations were conducted in the period under review. According to the quality assessment, one report was satisfactory, five were moderately satisfactory, two were moderately unsatisfactory, and three were not rated. Evaluation reports are available at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/plans/detail/1516>.

<sup>6</sup> The GRES classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative, gender blind, gender targeted, gender responsive and gender transformative.

The draft ICPE report was quality-assured through internal and external review processes before being submitted to the country office and RBLAC for comments and the identification of any factual errors. The revised report was then shared with the Government and other national partners for comment. A final stakeholder debriefing was held via video-conference, bringing together representatives of major programme stakeholders, offering an additional opportunity to discuss the results of the evaluation and ways forward in the next cycle, including the management response presented by the UNDP country office.

### 1.3 Country context

Paraguay is a landlocked developing country, with an upper-middle-income economy and a population of 6.1 million, mostly young and urban, but also, more than one 140,000 indigenous people belonging to 19 groups.<sup>7</sup> The country's economy has historically been linked to agriculture and the exploitation of natural resources, but it has committed to transition to a more industrial productive base. The country's efforts to address development challenges have been reflected in its *National Development Plan Paraguay 2030* (NDP 2030) and its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sound macroeconomic policies and sustained economic growth enabled the country to make significant progress, until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other recent shocks, such as droughts or inflation due to international food and fuel prices, have suppressed growth and poverty reduction. Growth in Gross Domestic Product decreased from an annual average of 4.4 percent between 2003 and 2018, to 0.7 percent between 2019 and 2022.<sup>8</sup> The 2023 General Budget of the Nation showed limited investment capacity, with only 14 percent allocated to physical investments, and 72 percent of spending for salaries, transfers and debt services.<sup>9</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the country, in terms of human lives lost, and increases in poverty and inequality. Since January 2020, there have been 734,840 COVID-19 cases and 19,849 deaths in Paraguay.<sup>10</sup> Although inflation has been largely under control, its emergence in 2022 affected purchasing power and access to basic goods and services. However, the country experienced a significant decline in inequality, from an estimated Gini index of 45.65 in 2019 to 42.76 in 2022,<sup>11</sup> partly explained by the positive impacts of the social transfers received in low-income households during the pandemic.

The country faces long-standing challenges in relation to the quality of employment. At the end of 2021, nearly two-thirds of employed people (64.2 percent) worked in the informal sector, a proportion that has hardly changed over the last decade.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Statistics, 2023. Preliminary Results of the National Population and Housing Census 2022. <https://www.ine.gov.py/>.

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/paraguay/overview>.

<sup>9</sup> Fundación Desarrollo en Democracia (Dende). <https://dende.org.py/pgn-2023-en-que-gasta-eleestado/>.

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization. <https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/py>.

<sup>11</sup> The World Bank Poverty Data. <https://pip.worldbank.org/home>.

<sup>12</sup> National Institute of Statistics. <https://www.ine.gov.py/>.



### FIGURE 3. Selected set of socioeconomic indicators

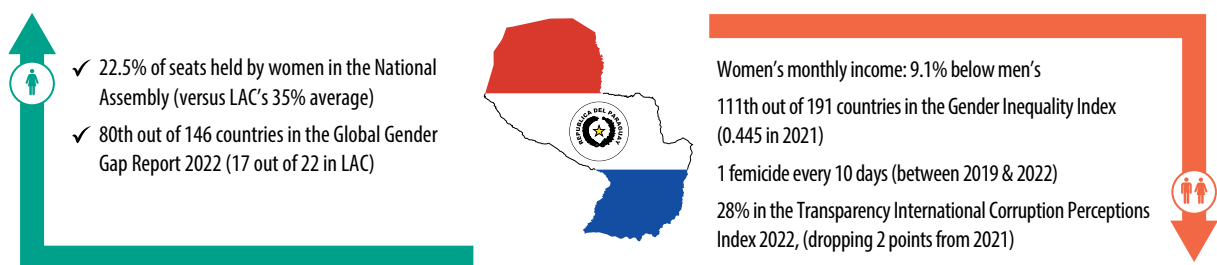


Source: IEO with data from the Human Development Index, UNDP; INE Paraguay; The World Bank; and the Central Bank of Paraguay

The country has been promoting changes to reinforce governance, social protection, democracy and justice, but challenges remain in terms of inequality, corruption, human rights and security. Paraguay scored 28 in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2022, dropping two points from 2021 and ranking 137 out of 180 countries. In terms of human rights, Paraguay accepted 202 out of the 210 recommendations received during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. Key challenges remaining include ensuring access to justice, improving the expeditiousness of courts and reducing the backlog of cases.

In terms of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, Paraguay still has major shortcomings due to socioeconomic inequalities, cultural prejudices, gender stereotypes and other gender gaps.<sup>13</sup> Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious problem, and it is estimated that almost 80 percent women over 18 have experienced GBV at least once in their lifetime.<sup>14</sup> Over half of the women surveyed by UN Women (54 percent) thought that partner abuse had worsened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>15</sup> Women are still underrepresented in the political arena, and Paraguay ranked 34 out of 146 countries in the Political Empowerment subindex.<sup>16</sup>

### FIGURE 4. Selected set of gender equality indicators



Sources: IEO with data from Inter-Parliamentary Union; World Economic Forum; International Labour Organization; UNDP, Human Development Report; The World Bank; and Transparency International

<sup>13</sup> UN Women Paraguay. <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/paraguay>.

<sup>14</sup> INE Paraguay, National Survey on the Situation of Women 2021, <https://www.ine.gov.py/>.

<sup>15</sup> UN Women, 2021. *Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women during COVID-19*. Digital edition.

<sup>16</sup> World Economic Forum, 2022. *Global Gender Gap Report, 2022, Insight Report*. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf).

Paraguay has two forest ecosystems under particular threat: the Atlantic Forest, a humid subtropical forest, rich in flora and fauna; and a large part of the Gran Chaco, the largest forested ecoregion in South America after the Amazon and the largest expanse of dry forest on the continent. The country's natural capital is highly vulnerable to land-use change, the effects of climate change, and has experienced extreme weather events, mainly droughts (2020–2022) and floods.

The country is among the few nations worldwide with an electricity system based almost exclusively on a renewable energy source, hydropower.<sup>17</sup> There is a large surplus of electricity, exported from the Itaipú and Yacyretá dams to Brazil and Argentina, respectively. Domestically, however, the primary energy sources used are non-renewable, including biomass and hydrocarbons.<sup>18</sup> The country faces inequality in electricity consumption, which correlates to inequality in human development.

**FIGURE 5. Selected set of environmental indicators**



Sources: IEO with data from INFONA and the Inter-American Development Bank

## 1.4 UNDP programme under review

UNDP has worked in Paraguay since 1977 with the signing of the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement by the Government of Paraguay. Over the years, the UNDP programme has been shaped by the country's evolving development priorities and challenges. In the previous programme cycle, UNDP sustained a close relationship with the Government of Paraguay, providing substantive institutional strengthening support for the implementation of environmental policies and social programmes. Improvements were seen in Paraguay's legislative and institutional climate change and disaster risk reduction frameworks, and in targeting instruments and criteria for the selection of beneficiaries for social protection programmes.

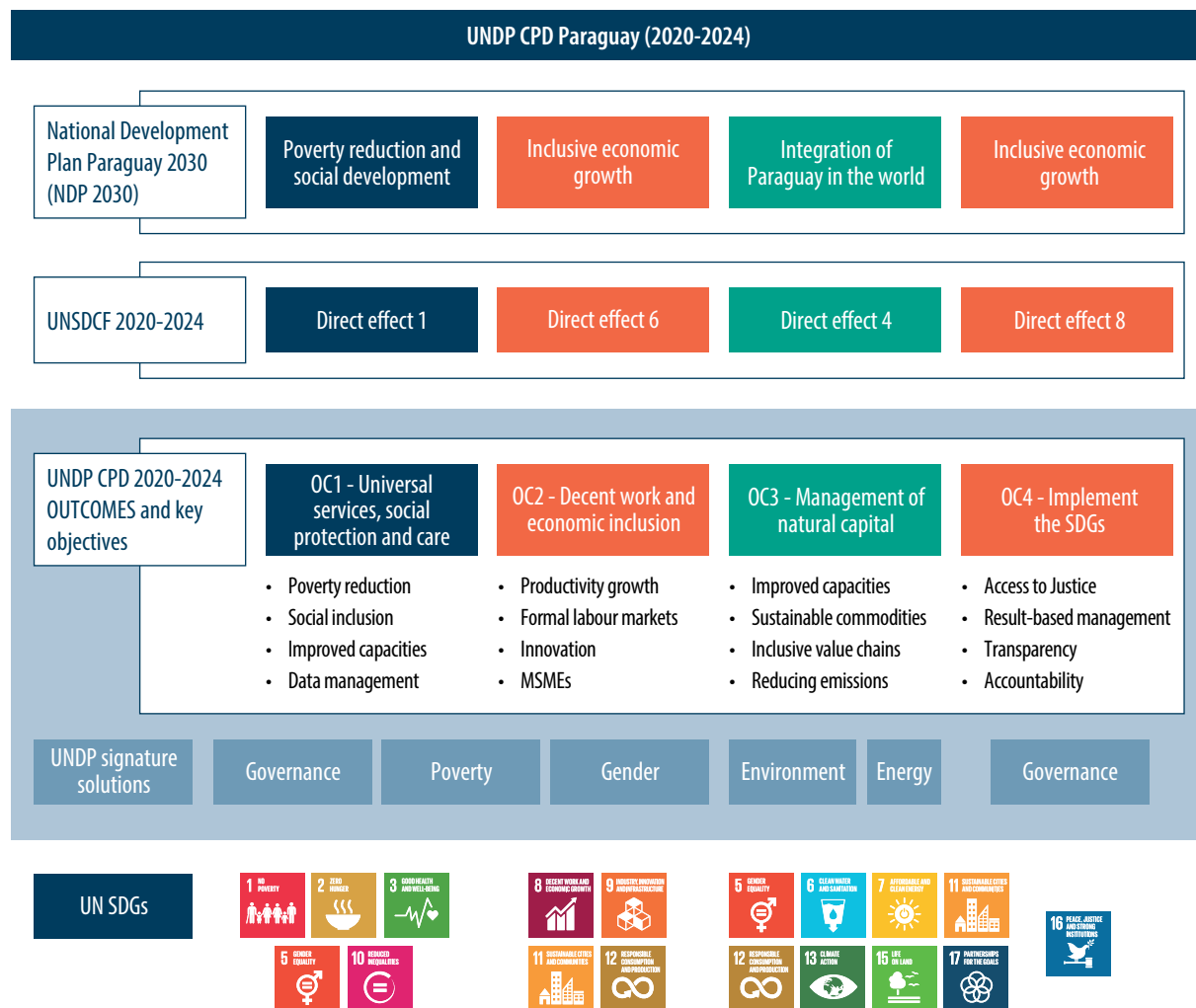
In the design of the current country programme (2020–2024),<sup>19</sup> UNDP Paraguay considered the areas highlighted as UNDP strengths – policy support, capacity development, technical assistance, advocacy dialogue and implementation capacity – and the priorities established in NDP 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, 2020–2024. Accordingly, the current CPD was designed around four outcomes: i) improved access to quality universal services, social protection and care; ii) generation of sustainable livelihoods, decent work and economic inclusion; iii) strengthened management of natural capital to enable sustainable and low-emission development; and iv) strengthened capacity to map inequalities and monitor and implement the SDGs and NDP 2030. See key objectives for each outcome in Figure 6.

<sup>17</sup> World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> Vice Ministry of Mines and Energy. <https://www.ssme.gov.py/vmme/>.

<sup>19</sup> See the current UNDP CPD 2020–2024 for Paraguay here: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3841334>.

**FIGURE 6. Alignment and key objectives of the UNDP CPD Paraguay 2020–2024**

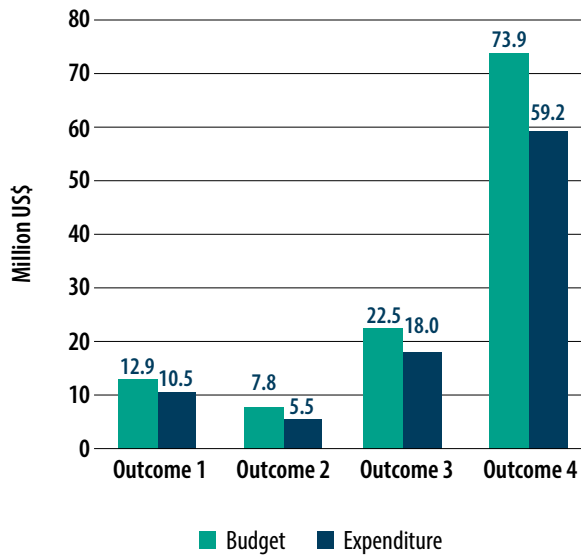


Source: IEO

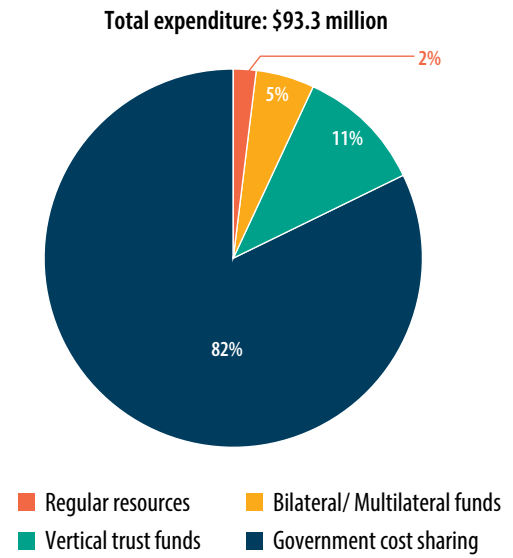
The CPD is underpinned by the following elements to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs: i) facilitate innovation; ii) play an integrator role; and iii) leave no one behind. Through this CPD, UNDP aimed to implement partnerships with a wide range of national partners, other United Nations agencies, donors, the private sector and civil society.

The CPD results framework is structured into four outcomes and nine outputs. The estimated budget for the five-year CPD amounted to US\$ 200.5 million, and expenditure by the end of 2023 was \$93.3 million, with almost two-thirds allocated to Outcome 4, as presented in Figure 7. Due to the country’s upper middle-income status, most of the resources for the CPD needed to be mobilized. Only 2 percent of programme expenditure was from the regular budget. The UNDP business model was closely linked to its ability to mobilize and execute funds provided by the Government, supporting the implementation of national programmes and projects. In the current cycle, more than \$76.6 million of funding of this type has been executed, representing 82 percent of all funds executed by UNDP, as shown in Figure 8.

**FIGURE 7. Budget and expenditure 2020–2023 by outcome**



**FIGURE 8. Expenditure by fund category for overall programme (2020–2023)**



Source: UNDP ATLAS & Quantum. Data as of February 2024

# CHAPTER 2

# FINDINGS



## 2.1 Strategic positioning and partnerships

**Finding 1. Strategic positioning.** UNDP effectively positioned itself as a recognized and reliable partner for Paraguayan institutional counterparts, particularly within the executive branch of the Government. It made its procedures and expertise available to provide high-quality goods and services in an agile, innovative and transparent manner, and partners and donors identified this as the most significant added value of the programme. Misinformation related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) hampered the full exploitation of this strategic positioning to support structural reforms to strengthen sustainable development and the reduction of inequalities in the country, despite the communication efforts of the country office to counteract this.

The relevance of UNDP work among government institutions was recognized throughout the evaluation process. Several state entities emphasized UNDP capacity to provide the necessary personnel and goods to achieve relevant institutional results. For example, UNDP support to hire personnel for the General Directorate of Non-Contributory Pensions of the Ministry of Finance (MoF)<sup>20</sup> enabled enumerators to visit municipalities twice a year, rather than once every four years, increasing the speed of identification of potential beneficiaries. UNDP support to the Technical Secretariat of Planning (STP) of the Cabinet directly led to the development of 10 Urban Plans for the Department of Asunción which focused for the first time on development.

The ability of UNDP to manage funds in an agile and transparent manner was highlighted, and this has positioned the country office as a preferred partner for multiple institutions in different fields. It was also identified as an area in which UNDP can continue to support modernization and transfer capacity to the national and local civil service. UNDP is recognized as an expert leader with high credibility in the field of environment and climate, and can integrate this into its work with different ministries. The Government perceives UNDP as an efficient partner with high technical capacity in project execution in coordination with the State. It demonstrated high efficiency in accessing vertical funds, especially aligned with the country's commitments, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Similarly, in the areas of governance and access to justice, respondents from the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ), the Superior Court of Electoral Justice (TSJE) and the National Anti-Corruption Secretariat (SENAC) highlighted the importance of UNDP for institutional expansion and strengthening.

UNDP demonstrated its commitment to strengthening public policy through data management, innovative solutions, and recommendations based on experimental research. Examples include the development of the Integrated Social Information System and the Wendá platform to support the response to COVID-19. UNDP promoted training in the design of innovation processes and user-centred public policies through the Public Innovators programme, supporting the National Innovation Strategy (ENI) and the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT), reflecting a national commitment to improving public administration.

This programme cycle was characterized by an adverse context in relation to public opinion of the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in the country. A skewed approach and a highly controversial debate on gender issues and their educational and public use, together with the resistance of some social actors to be associated with the SDGs, has hindered progress.<sup>21</sup> UNDP had some funds to develop campaigns to promote the SDGs during 2021–2022. These campaigns were adapted to

<sup>20</sup> Law 7158 of August 14, 2023, established the Ministry of Economy and Finance. It merged the Ministry of Finance, the Civil Service Secretariat and the Technical Secretariat for Economic and Social Development Planning.

<sup>21</sup> More detail on how this directly impacted gender equality work can be found in finding 18.

different audiences, including young people, but funding restrictions limited this strategy. The country office was not able to maintain a fully resourced communications team, resulting in a more reactive than preventive communication practice.

**Finding 2. Partnerships and programmatic coherence.** UNDP Paraguay strengthened its collaboration with the Government and relevant socioeconomic actors, but its collaboration with some other key national actors, the private sector and civil society could be strengthened. Expansion of the international donor portfolio was limited, except in the area of the environment. Partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs) were impeded by the lack of interinstitutional agreement at global level, and joint projects with other United Nations agencies were also limited.

UNDP focused its work on institutional strengthening and direct support for the effective implementation of policies, programmes and projects of national counterparts. The request for such support shows recognition of UNDP effectiveness, relevant to an upper-middle-income economy with few alternative sources for development funding. UNDP efforts to build partnerships with national institutions have been intense throughout the period. The most significant shortcoming in this cycle has been the limited interaction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) and the Ministry of Social Development (MDS), given the leading role of their portfolios in achieving UNDP objectives on sustainable production and social protection, respectively.

Work with other socioeconomic actors was boosted during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a way to advance recovery, enabled through access to vertical funds and dialogue-driven approaches. However, relevant programme themes such as the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, social dialogue, or the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment would have benefited from more significant interaction with civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. A clear offer of products and services, adapted to the needs and reality of the country, developed and offered by/or implemented with the support of RBLAC, could have facilitated interaction and partnership with CSOs and the private sector.

Efforts to expand the donor portfolio and mobilize financial resources from IFIs encountered operational incompatibilities, and a lack of global agreements between UNDP and IFIs such as the Inter-American Development Bank or the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean. This prevented joint interventions at country office level. Different IFIs recognize common interests with UNDP, including a focus on infrastructure and energy development, and growing concern about social impact. One common focus is sustainability, including the transition to a green economy, investment in electric mobility, leveraging hydroelectric energy and participation in the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) Facility,<sup>22</sup> a critical issue, given that mobilizing credits from IFIs is a government priority.

Various joint proposals were developed with other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, but none came to fruition. Integrated responses based on a common narrative were only achieved on very limited topics, such as GBV with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), or transgender rights with UNFPA and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS). In the environment sector, interinstitutional work was carried out with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), but under very specific circumstances, linked to a novel role as the executing agency within a project. Common strategies for accessing new sources of financing from the few international actors in the country, such as the European Union, have not been pursued.

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<sup>22</sup> Since 2023 called the Mitigation Action Facility. <https://mitigation-action.org>.

## 2.2 Outcome 1: Universal services, social protection and care

**CPD Outcome 1:** By 2024, people who live and are in transit in Paraguay, especially those in vulnerable situations, will have improved access to quality universal services, social protection and care.

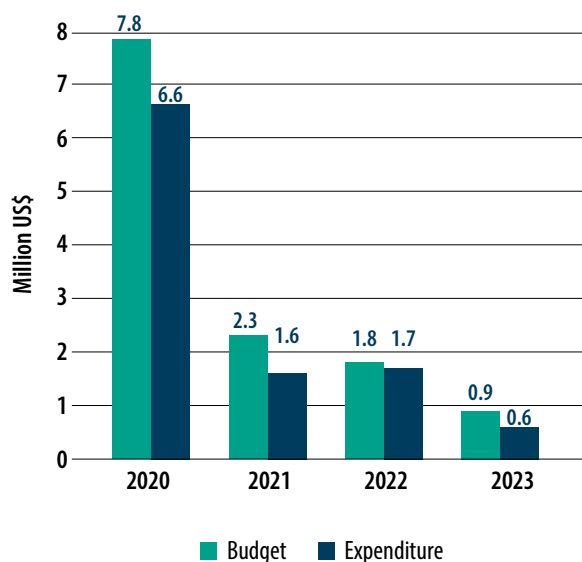
### Related outputs:

**OUTPUT 1.1:** Innovative models and knowledge products developed to foster informed decision-making on social programmes and policies that will benefit vulnerable groups such as people living in poverty, indigenous people, women and youth.

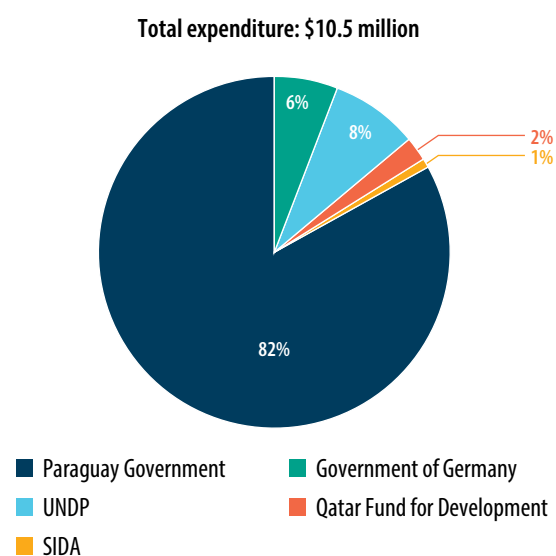
**OUTPUT 1.2:** Improved national and subnational capacities for data management, analysis and intersectoral coordination for development, implementation and monitoring of social programmes that will benefit the poor and other vulnerable groups.

During the current programme cycle, UNDP implemented 14 projects under this outcome, with a budget of \$12.9 million (against an estimate of \$43 million at the beginning of the cycle), and expenditure of \$10.5 million (see Figure 9 for a breakdown by year). The delivery rate was 82 percent over the first four years of the programme. The limited mobilization of resources in this outcome was linked to its strong dependence on government cost-sharing sources (see Figure 10), the changes in government priorities following the emergence of COVID-19, and the resulting low interaction with some key ministries for social protection.

**FIGURE 9. Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 1**



**FIGURE 10. Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 1**



Source: UNDP ATLAS & Quantum. Data as of February 2024



**Finding 3. Social protection.** UNDP provided technical assistance to enhance government management capacity, and improved information systems facilitated evidence-based decision-making on social protection. However, limited interaction with the MDS reduced the scope of this contribution.

During the current programme cycle, UNDP focused its actions on strengthening entities responsible for coordinating the three basic pillars of the social protection system (SPS) in Paraguay.<sup>23</sup> In 2018, the Government launched the SPS, *Vamos*, to guide social protection actions at municipal level. With funding from the binational Itaipú Dam, UNDP provided technical support to the Management Unit of the Presidency of the Republic and the Technical Unit of the Social Cabinet to strengthen their performance and the promotion of the new SPS.<sup>24</sup>

UNDP focused support on information systems, to strengthen the Integrated Social Information System (SIIS)<sup>25</sup> and its data visualization platform *e-Heka*.<sup>26</sup> These tools help to monitor more than 100 programmes across 26 institutions, with the capacity to disaggregate data by district and enable better evidence-based decision-making. Together with the piloting of the *Vamos* social security system, this contributed to an integrated vision of social protection which incorporates innovative public policy approaches, and promotes a localized inclusion and life-cycle approach. UNDP support to develop the Comprehensive Social Protection Register provided a tool to strengthen the capacity of relevant institutions to collect data on population and household composition by type and area, to identify their protection status and target benefits.

Progress was positively valued by participating counterparts, who considered this a step forward in the promotion of results-based management in Paraguay. However, the scope of *Vamos* SPS was limited, covering only 11 of the country's 263 municipal districts. Similarly, information systems require further development. The SIIS needs to be updated to facilitate automated online data uploads and overcome persistent challenges in collecting regular data from different institutions.

Given that these initiatives took place within an incipient process of institutional development, their sustainability and future impact rely on their ability to take root within the Government. The emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic altered the Government's priorities, and consequently, the continued structural development of the new social policy. The main weakness identified in UNDP support to promote the country's SPS during this cycle was the lack of interaction with the MDS, which limited its ability to contribute directly to national social programmes such as *Tekopora* or *Tenondera*, which focus on supporting the country's most vulnerable populations.

**Finding 4. Inclusive public services.** UNDP demonstrated adaptability to the COVID-19 pandemic, efficient management, and a drive for innovation to promote the improvement of public services in the country. However, the extent to which these contributions successfully benefitted priority vulnerable populations cannot be easily verified.

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<sup>23</sup> The three basic pillars of the SPS are: i) the contributory social security system; ii) the non-contributory, or compensatory, social programmes for poverty reduction; and iii) universal basic social services, i.e. the public health system and the public education sector.

<sup>24</sup> The Social Cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic is the body in charge of promoting, coordinating and directing the management of programmes and public policies of the national Government on social issues. It is presided over by the President of the Republic.

<sup>25</sup> SIIS is a social protection policy management tool that integrates information on individuals and potential beneficiaries (a single register of beneficiaries), in addition to available public services (social programmes) and the associated budgets.

<sup>26</sup> The e-Heka Data and Indicator Visualization Platform is a publicly accessible digital tool that graphically displays data on the SIIS. The objectives of creating the Platform were to promote transparency, social innovation and more efficient management.

The UNDP CPD identified four categories of vulnerable populations whose quality of life could be improved through stronger social services: poor people, indigenous peoples, women and youth. To this end, UNDP has implemented a variety of initiatives in the fields of health, public service innovation, and land registration. Respondents recognized the relevance of these initiatives, for their adaptability to emergency contexts or for addressing the country's structural deficits. However, the interventions lacked programmatic coherence, limiting opportunities for synergy, and their impact on target populations.

UNDP demonstrated adaptability and efficiency in response to the COVID-19 emergency, reconfiguring the project to support specialist hospitals through the provision of biomedical equipment at the end of 2019 with funds from Itaipú. With the delivery of 452 biomedical machines and materials to 14 hospitals, medical centres and specialized institutes, this project improved the hospitalization and care of COVID-19 patients. In particular, the timely delivery of 30 ventilators by the end of May 2020 contributed to the treatment of severe COVID-19 patients. These ventilators were efficiently distributed to hospitals in Asunción and Central departments, where the infection rate was highest. The counterpart mentioned timely delivery and good value for money as key factors that influenced the decision to expand the initial project to support the national vaccination programme.

The response to COVID-19 was also able to use innovation funds to promote inclusive and quality public services. Under the ENI, and through its Accelerator Lab,<sup>27</sup> UNDP developed the *Wendá* Platform to coordinate three pillars of action: business, labour and citizen resilience.<sup>28</sup> *Wendá* coordinated and empowered stakeholders and institutions to create initiatives and optimize available resources to face the challenges of social distancing during the pandemic. UNDP also supported the Public Innovators programme as a strategy to generate capacity for innovation in public institutions, in line with the ENI and in alliance with CONACYT. A second edition of the programme was launched in 2023.

UNDP support to the National Land Registry Service (SNC), strengthened its capacity to keep the land register continuously updated. SNC is responsible for the registration of all real estate in the country, including data on the ownership and value. This is a fundamental public service, key to administration of the real estate tax, but due to historical weaknesses in the registration of land ownership in the country, it had been a structural challenge. With funds from *Itaipú*, UNDP supported the modernization of SNC services through technical training and digitization, including the development of digital tools to update cartography and land registry data, procurement of hardware and software, and hiring of technical teams. Institutional strengthening is reflected in the increase in certificates successfully delivered, which increased from 58 percent of requested certificates in 2018 to 85 percent in 2021.

UNDP projects showed weaknesses in project data, limiting the ability to identify and measure the ultimate beneficiaries of these actions to improve public services and assess whether the target population, people in vulnerable situations, had actually been reached. It was difficult to find accurate information on the proportion of beneficiaries belonging to vulnerable populations who recognized an improvement in access to social services. This situation, together with the thematic diversity of the UNDP programme, limited the effectiveness of the theory of change to guide the implementation of the programme.

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<sup>27</sup> Since 2019, UNDP has started 91 Labs, covering 115 countries, designed to close the gap between the current practices of international development in an accelerated pace of change. More details here: [www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs](http://www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs).

<sup>28</sup> See [www.wenda.org.py](http://www.wenda.org.py).

## 2.3 Outcome 2: Inclusive economic growth

**CPD Outcome 2:** By 2024, Paraguay implements public policies that promote the generation of sustainable livelihoods, decent work and economic inclusion with emphasis on people in vulnerable situations, with a rights and gender approach.

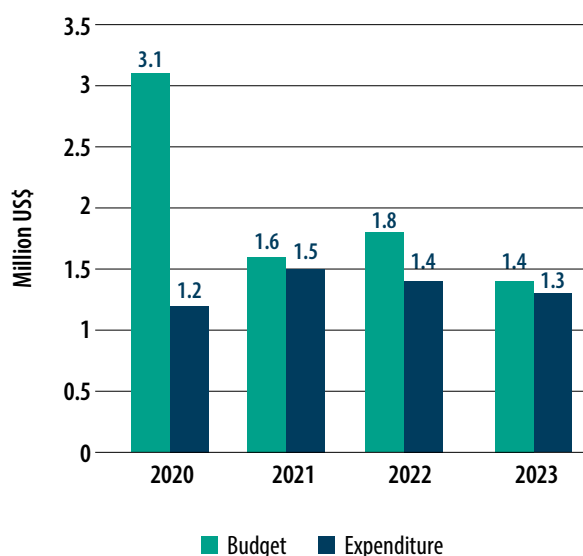
### Related outputs:

**OUTPUT 2.1:** Strengthened national and subnational capacity for implementing public policies that promote the economic inclusion of people in vulnerable situations, particularly in rural areas, including land access and small-scale agriculture.

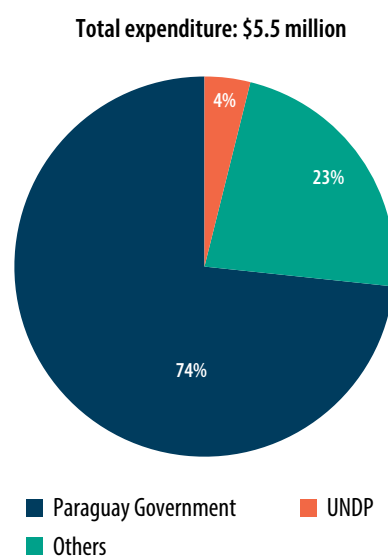
**OUTPUT 2.2:** Strengthened national capacity to articulate plans and programmes for promoting decentralization, local development, competitiveness and micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) strengthening.

Outcome 2 is the smallest in the portfolio, with nine projects and a budget of \$7.8 million, in line with CPD projections. The country office spent \$5.5 million (see Figure 11 for a breakdown by year), representing a 71 percent delivery rate over the 2020–2022 period. The main source of funding for this outcome came from the Government (Figure 12), including the National Institute for Rural Development and Land (INDERT), and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC).

**FIGURE 11.** Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 2



**FIGURE 12.** Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 2



Source: UNDP ATLAS & Quantum. Data as of February 2024

**Finding 5. Economic inclusion.** UNDP contributed to strengthening INDERT to facilitate access to and ownership of land, and boost rural economic development. The extent of support to economic inclusion, however, was limited by the lack of financing for the planned promotion of family farming and food production.

The legal regularization of land is one of the main development challenges of the Paraguayan State. It is a key issue for economic inclusion in rural areas, but can also be a source of conflict. For this reason, UNDP support to and institutional strengthening of INDERT, as the statutory entity responsible for legal land regularization, have been highly relevant.<sup>29</sup> This support has increased the number of people with access to land, providing beneficiaries with legal security and full ownership rights and integrating them into the national economy.

Through the effective administration of human, material, and financial resources, UNDP contributed to boosting the productivity of INDERT. This included support for the recruitment of technical personnel and implementation of the INDERT Land Tenure Information System. Since 2019, this information system has been a key factor in increasing the number of plots of land registered with the Public Registry Office, from 20 or 30 to over 1,000 per year. For instance, in 2020, 2,751 plots were registered, accounting for 111 percent of the annual target. In 2022, the land regularization process updated information on 63 colonies (17 of which were new, and 46 percent of which had women owners), awarded 4,399 plots and completed 1,628 title deeds.

Although INDERT and SNC interact closely, the need to further enhance their collaboration became evident during this programme cycle. Respondents identified UNDP as a potential source of support, to link these institutions and maximize synergy, as well as for greater South-South and triangular cooperation to introduce good practices. It also emerged that the project requires reinforcement of the technological component for sustainability, and greater sharing of knowledge and support in order to better assess its impact on beneficiaries.

UNDP failed to implement key initiatives planned at the beginning of the programme that would have allowed it to directly affect the livelihoods of vulnerable beneficiaries in rural areas. Planned activities for the promotion of family agriculture or food production were not carried out in this cycle, due to difficulties obtaining the funds earmarked by MAG. Indeed, one of the greatest risks of working with government funds materialized: although MAG committed resources through a project document, they were not transferred to UNDP.

**Finding 6. Employment and MSMEs.** UNDP contributions in the current programme cycle were few and mostly linked to the experimental initiatives promoted by the Accelerator Lab. The generation of data and knowledge on labour informality and the needs of the MSME sector has been strengthened, and some specific actions to support business internationalization were promoted, but the scale and scope of initiatives were limited.

UNDP prioritized addressing the issue of labour informality, a significant weakness in Paraguay's labour market. This problem leads to lost tax revenues, increased inequality, reduced productivity, and heightened social insecurity. The "Labour Informality and Pandemic" project aimed to mitigate risks for informal workers during COVID-19. Through a participatory laboratory with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MTESS), UNDP aimed to find innovative solutions aligned with the Integrated Employment Formalization Strategy, 2018-2023. The knowledge product "Analysis of the Social Capital Survey, Economic

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<sup>29</sup> INDERT's mission is to promote the harmonious integration of the peasant population into the economic and social development of the nation.

Vulnerability and Social Action” enabled the gap between the level of social capital and aid demand in the country to be mapped. However, challenges of integration with counterparts and the lack of ownership of the methodologies weakened the effectiveness and sustainability of these efforts.

The Accelerator Lab focused research on the high rate of informality of MSMEs in Paraguay, generating knowledge products that aroused international interest. Analysis was undertaken of the construction, domestic work and garment manufacturing sectors. The services of Entrepreneur Support Centres were strengthened in cities such as Encarnación and San Lorenzo. In addition, the Lab tested the hypothesis that technical support customized to the needs of the garment sector and garment clusters could improve the productive and working conditions of MSMEs. Through the LOCAL programme, garment clusters were promoted in municipalities such as Yaguarón, Mariano Roque Alonso and Pilar.<sup>30</sup> To date, they have generated a wealth of information and greater clarity on the sector’s needs.

UNDP facilitated Paraguay’s participation in Expo Dubai 2021, opening a space for the promotion and internationalization of the products and services of national MSMEs. Support was provided for the design and installation of Paraguay’s pavilion, as well as logistical support. However, this has not been followed up by sustainability or monitoring actions to determine and maximize the impact of investments in business promotion or the country’s branding.

## 2.4 Outcome 3: Natural capital management

**CPD Outcome 3:** By 2024, national and subnational public and private sector institutions and civil society will have strengthened the management of natural capital to enable sustainable and low-emission development.

### **Related outputs:**

**OUTPUT 3.1:** Improved capacities and coordination in public and private sectors for the design and implementation of policies, plans and solutions for the sustainable management of natural capital – both in urban and rural areas – with a gender and resilience approach. This includes continuing the work on sustainable commodities and inclusive value chains.

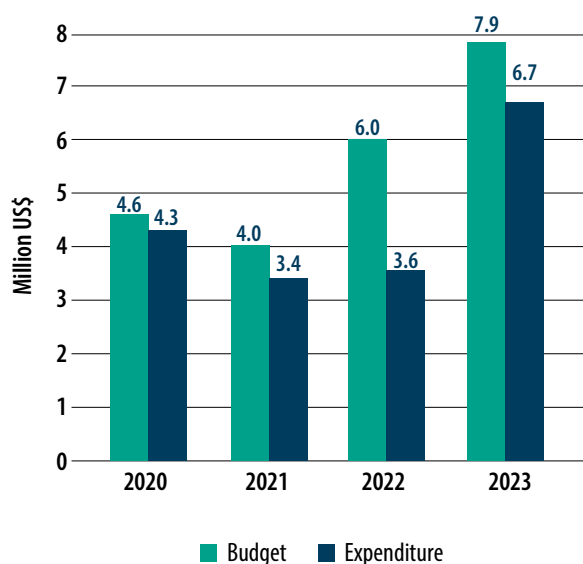
**OUTPUT 3.2:** Policies, actions, measures and solutions designed for reducing emissions and contamination at the national, departmental and municipal levels to promote sustainable, low emission and resilient growth, considering adequate disaster risk management.

**OUTPUT 3.3:** Information, dialogues and/or solutions developed, financed and applied at scale for energy efficiency and transformation to clean energy and zero-carbon development.

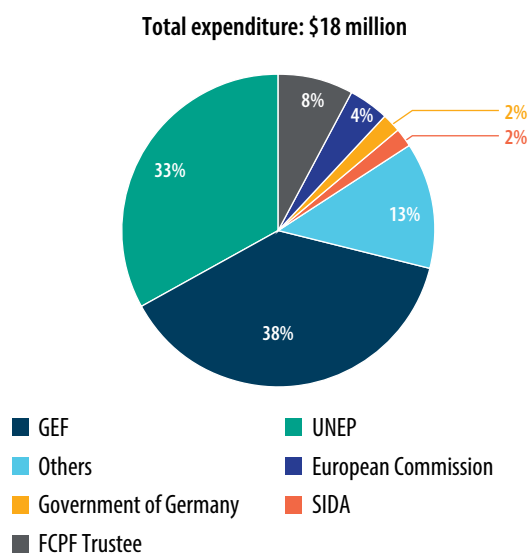
<sup>30</sup> <https://www.undp.org/es/paraguay/proyectos/local>.

In Outcome 3, UNDP implemented 18 projects, with a budget of \$22.5 million during the first four years, in a position to surpass the estimated \$25.6 million for the whole cycle, and expenditure of \$18 million (see Figure 13 for a breakdown by year). The delivery rate was 80 percent. UNDP mobilized diverse funding sources, capitalizing on the opportunities provided by different vertical funding sources for this outcome. Nearly 40 percent of the funds executed came from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), 33 percent from UNEP, 8 percent from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, and 17 percent from others (see Figure 14 for the full breakdown).

**FIGURE 13. Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 3**



**FIGURE 14. Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 3**



Source: UNDP ATLAS & Quantum. Data as of February 2024

**Finding 7. Environmental institutional strengthening.** In a challenging environment, UNDP successfully enhanced public sector capacity to fulfil its international environmental obligations. This included improving environmental and forestry information systems and monitoring functions for better management of the country’s natural resources. However, there was limited consideration of the country’s increasing vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events in the design of these interventions.

In this programme cycle, UNDP concentrated its efforts on enhancing the capacity of MADES and INFONA. These two institutions play a crucial role in protecting ecosystems from deforestation and climate change, while preserving their biodiversity. The importance of this institutional strengthening is underscored by the threats faced by a key forest ecosystem in Paraguay, the Paraguayan Chaco. This region has experienced some of the highest global land use change rates over the past two decades, mainly due to activities related to agriculture and cattle farming. The region has also experienced social challenges related to the food security of vulnerable communities and conflict over land tenure. The transfer of technical capacities to these institutions has allowed a move from a traditional UNDP Direct Implementation Modality (DIM) portfolio to one with five National Implementation Modality (NIM) projects.

UNDP has supported Paraguay to complete its REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) readiness process and meeting all of the UNFCCC Warsaw Framework requirements. This enabled Paraguay to apply for results-based payments from the Green Climate Fund for greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions during 2015-2017. In 2020, the Fund disbursed \$50 million to Paraguay, which are being used to implement the National Forestry Strategy for Sustainable Growth and operationalize the National Climate Change Fund. UNEP is leading the project implementation and, for the first time, UNDP is playing the role of executing partner, thereby decreasing the bureaucratic burden and allowing a greater focus on supporting the technical strengthening of the government counterpart. This marks a significant step towards sustainable development and climate change mitigation in Paraguay.

UNDP also contributed to support to Paraguay to meet its UNFCCC commitments. Paraguay submitted its first updated Nationally Determined Contribution and the third Biennial Update Report to the UNFCCC in 2021. The fourth National Communication, including a GHG inventory, was submitted in 2023. These commitments and reports reflect Paraguay's dedication to contribute to global efforts to combat climate change under the UNFCCC.

UNDP provided support to INFONA to digitalize the registry of land use plans of the Paraguayan Chaco and upload information to Global Forest Watch, which allowed for better monitoring of land use changes and the identification of illegal practices. This information, together with the monitoring of licences provided through the MADES Environmental Information System, facilitated the preparation of monitoring reports on land use change.

The changes expected from these contributions are not yet perceptible in the field, and may face a sustainability challenge given the country's growing vulnerability to extreme climate events. Between 2020 and 2024, Paraguay experienced a series of severe environmental and health crises, including the worst drought in 50 years, extensive forest fires, the COVID-19 pandemic, and floods. These events posed significant humanitarian challenges, including food security, access to clean water, livelihoods, and security concerns. The rural indigenous population, primarily located in the western departments of Alto Paraguay, Boquerón, and Canindeyú, was severely impacted by the drought and forest fires.

During the programme cycle, few UNDP interventions addressed crisis contexts, focusing on access to water and adapted technology. These interventions had a significant impact on local beneficiary communities. For instance, 38 households in the community of Teniente Esteban Martinez in the Paraguayan Chaco gained access to drinking water through a water harvesting system (*atajados*), a water filtration and purification plant, and solar energy. Similarly, the Guarayo-Guarani indigenous community of Macharety benefited from UNDP support to construct earth ponds (*tajamares*), which helped to prevent livestock deaths. The provision of a manual forage grinding machine also enabled them to generate food stock for times of drought and floods.

**Finding 8. Sustainable production and management.** UNDP has supported Paraguay to increase the sustainability of its beef and soybean supply chains, with globally innovative approaches to climate-smart agriculture and livestock. The effectiveness of initiatives to reduce GHG emissions is not yet evident, and sustainability depends on the ownership of the initiatives by key actors in the country and clear incentives on the demand side.

Paraguay exemplifies the complex and systemic nature of the interrelationship between supply chains for food and agricultural commodities, economic development and environmental and social challenges. To promote a paradigm shift and more diversified and resilient agroecological systems, UNDP has enabled the piloting of global initiatives such as the Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems in Paraguay, 31 and participation in the Good Growth Partnership to reduce the global impact of agricultural commodities on GHG emissions and biodiversity.

Through initiatives such as “Sustainable Commodities, Green Chaco, Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration”, the “Results-Based Payments” project, and “Paraguay *mas Verde*”, UNDP has fostered a paradigm shift in the country towards more sustainable production. This has been achieved by developing planning and management instruments and tools; establishing demonstration plots with sustainable production; certifying hectares under international standards; creating multilevel and multisectoral coordination mechanisms; developing capacity in the private and public sectors; and promoting the demand for sustainable products. These efforts significantly contributed to the country’s SDGs, but only as part of a larger effort necessary to fully realize its sustainability objectives.

UNDP has contributed to the development of the Paraguayan Roundtables for Sustainable Beef and Sustainable Soybean. These are spaces for dialogue and participation where the public and private sector, academia and other stakeholders, such as indigenous communities, can address challenges in sustainable management. These platforms are recognized and used by sector stakeholders. For example, the Paraguayan Roundtable for Sustainable Beef has supported efforts to increase MADES transparency, publishing all the environmental plans and licenses it approved, including for owners of deforested land.

The effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives were undermined by insufficient ownership by some stakeholders. Despite the efforts and progress made, not all private sector agriculture and cattle stakeholders recognized clear incentives or the advantages of sustainable production and conservation. At times, these incentives were seen to threaten the profitability or sustainability of their businesses. Climate-smart agriculture targets can only be reached through action on both supply and demand sides, which makes the implementation of such measures challenging. It is crucial for all stakeholders to understand and embrace the long-term benefits of sustainable practices for the health of the environment and the sustainability of their businesses.

MAG did not fully support some of the initiatives and products promoted by UNDP interventions. These products, such as the Good Practices Manual and the Definition of Sustainable Production, as well as the Livestock NAMA project proposal, were tested in the field and approved and supported by local platforms but have not yet been able to scale up nationwide. Without full ownership and understanding of the benefits of the proposed solutions, the long-term sustainability of these initiatives will be limited, which could lead to continued deforestation and environmental degradation.

Land use change rates in Paraguay have decreased since 2018, but remain high, particularly in El Chaco. INFONA reported 700 thousand hectares of native forest lost in the Chaco in the 2018-2022 period (see Table 1 below). Most of these changes were carried out legally, through land use plans granted by INFONA. The challenge remains for Paraguay to seize the opportunity for transformation to benefit from new international markets. Its development will be affected by the expanded use of the carbon border

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.undp.org/facs>.



adjustment mechanisms; more trade agreements that include environmental provisions; import bans on agricultural and beef products that cannot prove that they were produced without deforestation; and the demand for traceability of goods and eco-labelling as proof of sustainable production.

**TABLE 1. Forest cover change in the western region: Hectares of native forest loss 2018-2022**

Period	Hectares of native forest loss (ha)
2018-2019	159.837
2019-2020	178.577
2020-2021	165.675
2021-2022	196.254
<b>TOTAL (2018-2022)</b>	<b>700.342</b>

Source: INFONA, 2023

**Finding 9. Biodiversity conservation.** UNDP has complemented actions for institutional strengthening and sustainable productive development with initiatives to promote ecosystem biodiversity. Small Grant Programme (SGP) initiatives were instrumental in involving indigenous communities and vulnerable groups, however, the scale and pace of deforestation overshadows the good practices identified.

As a result of the institutional strengthening actions described in Finding 7, UNDP has contributed to the enabling conditions for several key initiatives in biodiversity conservation. Today, the development of conservation maps in the Chaco region allows for the creation of biodiversity corridors, which are essential for maintaining ecological connectivity and ensuring the survival of various species. By supporting the management plans of protected areas such as Caazapá and Serranía de San Luis, UNDP has begun its contribution to strengthening the National System of Protected Areas. Through the National Biodiversity Strategy which is in development, and the Desertification Strategy, which has been finalized, UNDP has strengthened Paraguay's planning tools, although these still need to be implemented.

Through the design of safeguards and grievance mechanisms, UNDP has contributed to the conditions for indigenous and vulnerable communities to receive economic benefits for the conservation of forest ecosystems. These initiatives have enabled access to other sources of climate finance that focus on forest conservation and increasing the resilience of the most vulnerable communities.

As of 2023, through the GEF-funded SGP 7<sup>th</sup> Operational Phase, implemented by UNDP and executed by the United Nations Office for Project Services, a portfolio of 49 projects had been implemented for total expenditure of almost \$1.8 million. 63 percent of the projects were in the portfolio focused on biodiversity, 31 percent on degraded land management, 4 percent on climate change, and 2 percent on capacity-building. Each project budget amounted to around \$40,000. Although the degree of synergy achieved with other UNDP projects was limited, some projects aligned with other UNDP initiatives, facilitating coordination and monitoring on the ground. This good practice enabled some initiatives to be scaled up by UNDP or MADES, but evidence of this is limited.

One recognized best practice was the use of SGP support to catalyse initiatives involving various government entities, to strengthen their contacts and facilitate access to additional sources of funding. This approach has proven effective in ensuring the sustainability of the results of seed and pilot initiatives. For example, one with the Paraguay Organic Association which focused on women’s economic and social empowerment in the production of medicinal herbs and agroecological orchards, and enabled them to strengthen their capacity and increase access to differentiated markets.

A few interventions, although minor, helped communities to cope with the effects of the drought, mitigate impacts, and enhance resilience to future extreme weather events. This demonstrates the need for programmes such as SGP to mobilize resources at scale to support vulnerable communities in the face of environmental challenges.

**Finding 10. Sustainability and urban resilience.** In this cycle, UNDP incorporated multilevel approaches to work with national and subnational authorities into its programmatic portfolio. This strengthened area planning and management in the areas of sustainability and urban resilience with high potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation, such as solid waste management, sustainable transport, sustainable construction and the effective management and conservation of urban protected areas.

Paraguay has traditionally been characterized by a highly centralized governance model, which has led to challenges in planning and land management at the subnational level. Given the country’s escalating urban growth and related sustainability issues, UNDP support for the development of urban land-use plans (POUTs) during this cycle has proven particularly relevant. UNDP was instrumental to the development of planning tools at municipal and metropolitan levels, thereby promoting more effective sustainable urban management.

UNDP successfully coordinated with various national and subnational entities to tackle urban challenges.<sup>32</sup> With direct support to STP, UNDP facilitated the development of 36 POUTs, for the Asunción Metropolitan Area (AMA) and other municipalities. Disaster risk reduction and urban resilience were also promoted through capacity-building and the development of 10 municipal disaster risk reduction plans. These POUTs and associated regulations are expected to directly affect the quality of life, social harmony, environmental protection and economic development of these municipalities, but it is too early to assess these impacts. As seen in Map 1, there are still urban population centres in Cordillera and Caaguazú that do not have any urban land use plans.

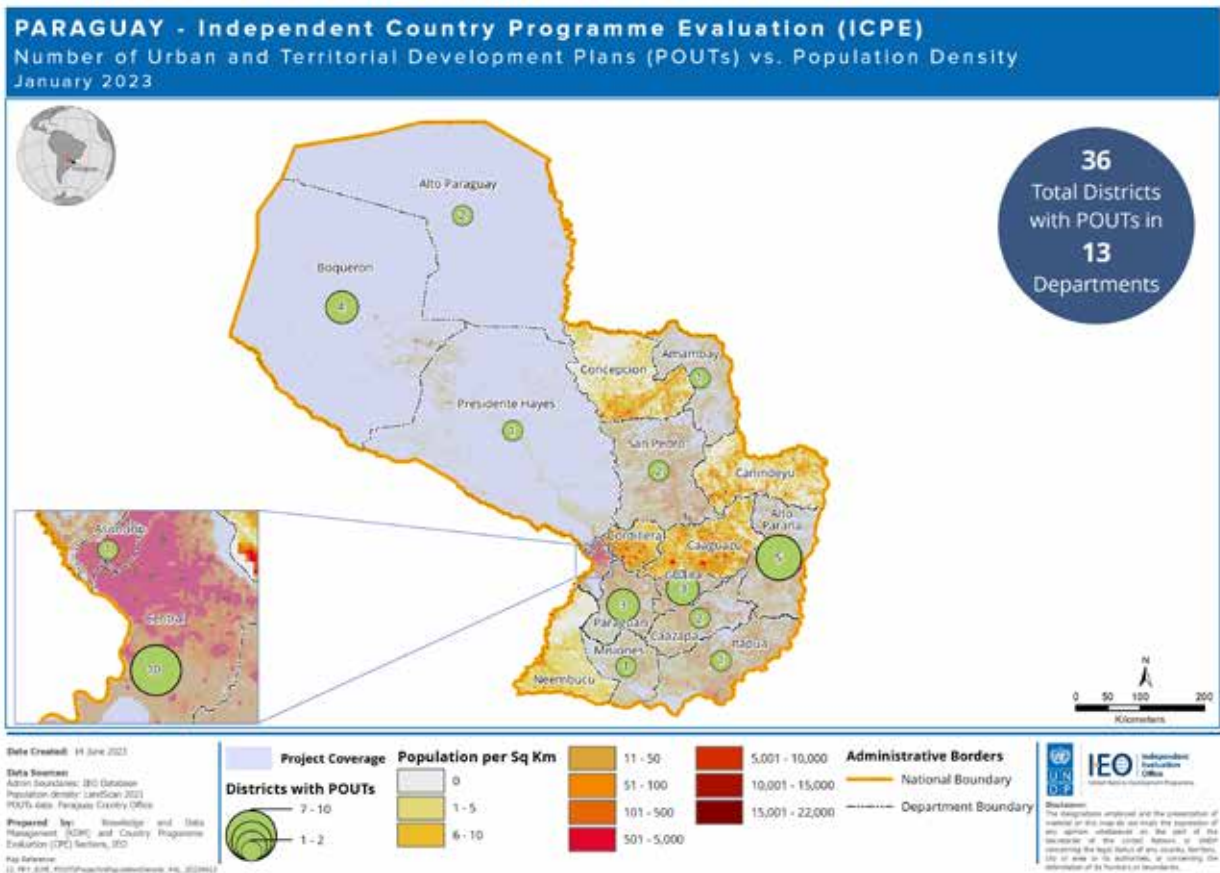
UNDP expanded its work into sustainable cities by implementing the “Asuncion Green City of the Americas – Pathways to Sustainability” project. This initiative yielded multiple benefits by integrating transport, solid waste management and green infrastructure, and executing pilot projects for AMA. The transport sector is particularly relevant due to the escalating rate of motorization, limited access to efficient public transportation systems, and substantial potential for GHG mitigation. To amplify the impact and reinforce the sustainability of this initiative, UNDP plans to continue developing a NAMA for the transport sector in the upcoming cycle.

The promotion of sustainable urban development faced significant challenges, as evidenced by the experiences in AMA. The cancellation of the first municipal Metrobus project, combined with resistance to global environmental initiatives and the bike path pilot project, highlight the difficulties in implementing change. However, UNDP has shown commendable adaptability in this challenging social, economic and political context. This learning on the importance of broad consultation processes and flexibility in project implementation is valuable, and underscores the need to negotiate with authorities and CSOs, and adapt to changes, when promoting sustainable urban development.

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<sup>32</sup> Including the Vice-Ministry of Transportation, Urban Planning, the Vice-Ministry of Energy, and the AMA Municipalities.

## MAP 1. Population density versus urban land-use plans developed



Source: IEO

**Finding 11. Clean energy.** UNDP made an ambitious reading of the context and its capacity to develop initiatives regarding energy efficiency and a transition to clean energy in line with carbon-neutral development. The dissemination of relevant knowledge products such as the National Report on Human Development and Energy 2020 was not sufficient to boost a portfolio of projects in this area.

Paraguay produces a large amount of clean energy, but its consumption matrix relies heavily on polluting imported fuels. Although the country's energy production is dominated by hydroelectric power, challenges persist, such as the need to import hydrocarbons for transport and industry, and a limited rural electricity network leading to reliance on coal, wood or hydrocarbons in many households. These provide opportunities for UNDP to assist the country in its transition to a carbon-neutral model.

For the past two programme cycles, UNDP has struggled to develop project proposals that secured funding in the field of energy. The previous ICPE noted the lack of interventions for inclusive and sustainable energy efficiency solutions and universal energy access.<sup>33</sup> This issue persists in the current cycle, despite renewed efforts of the country office to prioritize this area.

<sup>33</sup> Finding 4 of ICPE UNDP Paraguay, 2019.

At the start of this programme cycle, UNDP effectively highlighted the topic through the 2020 National Report on Human Development and Energy, which emphasized energy transition, electromobility and energy efficiency, offering recommendations for harnessing the country's clean energy potential. Several events were organized to discuss the findings and conclusions of the report, which provided timely support to Paraguay in two key areas: i) enhancing the country's performance in SDG-related energy sector indicators; and ii) providing crucial technical information to prepare for the 2023 renegotiation with Brazil of the *Itaipú* Treaty Annex C regarding tariffs and distribution criteria.<sup>34</sup> This renegotiation may bring significant economic resources for the country's development from 2024 onwards.

This initial momentum was aligned with the broader corporate effort reflected in Signature Solution 5 of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021: Close the Energy Gap. UNDP launched another knowledge product, Paraguay's Energy Outlook to 2050,<sup>35</sup> to complement the National Energy Policy to 2040, and Energy Outlook, 2013-2040. However, the country's capacity to generate clean electricity undermines the need to access resources from vertical and other funds to transform its energy matrix. The reports pointed out that accessing climate finance for Paraguay's energy sector requires strategies to enhance access to and utilization of clean energy, with public and private electromobility highlighted as an important development pathway.

## 2.5 Outcome 4: Efficient public services

**CPD Outcome 4:** By 2024, Paraguay will have strengthened capacity to map inequalities and to monitor and implement the SDGs and the Paraguay 2030 National Development Plan.

**Related outputs:**

**OUTPUT 4.1:** Strengthened national capacity for implementing, monitoring, reporting and establishing partnerships for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aligned with the NDP 2030.

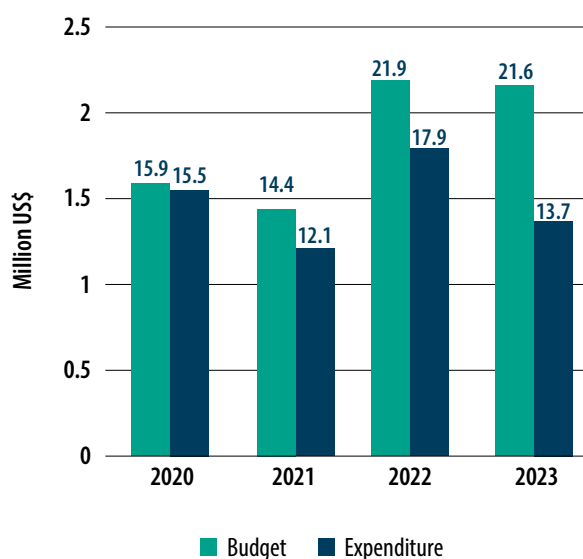
**OUTPUT 4.2:** Strengthened national capacity to provide efficient and accountable public services, including in areas such as social inclusion programmes and access to justice that benefit vulnerable groups, including women.

UNDP Outcome 4 was the most significant of the portfolio, with 26 projects and a budget of \$73.9 million, although this amount was 25 percent lower than planned in the CPD. The country office was able to spend \$59.2 million (see Figure 15 for the breakdown by year), which represents a delivery rate of 80 percent during the period 2020-2023. The main source of funding for UNDP under this outcome was the Government (see Figure 16), and key government partners included the SCJ, Ministry of Public Works and Communication (MPWC), MoF, MoIC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and SENAC.

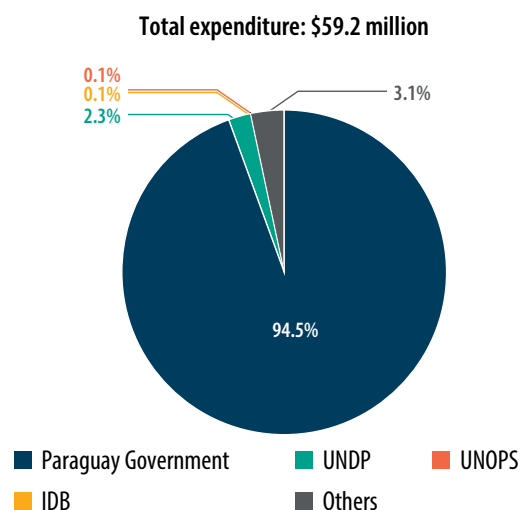
<sup>34</sup> The Itaipú Treaty was signed on 26 April 1973. Paraguay and Brazil must review the provisions of Annex C upon the completion of 50 years from the entry into force of this document, a deadline that was met on 13 August 2023.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.undp.org/es/paraguay/publications/prospectiva-energetica-de-paraguay-2050>.

**FIGURE 15. Evolution of budget and expenditure: Outcome 4**



**FIGURE 16. Source of expenditure by donor: Outcome 4**



Source: UNDP ATLAS & Quantum. Data as of February 2024

**Finding 12. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.** UNDP strengthened the country’s compliance with and capacity for reporting on Agenda 2030, and the incorporation of the SDGs into government and parliamentary activity, despite a challenging context. Contributions to generating partnerships and localization to meet the SDGs were limited. Promoting financing for development, and generating, monitoring and using data for decision-making, continue to be a challenge.

Despite a context of misinformation regarding Agenda 2030 in the country, UNDP was instrumental in promoting its incorporation into various institutional spheres. UNDP provided technical assistance to the SDG Paraguay Commission,<sup>36</sup> with the aim of supporting the coordination, implementation, supervision, monitoring and reporting of compliance of NDP 2030 with Agenda 2030. During this period, it supported the preparation of the Second Voluntary National Review (VNR) “Paraguay 2021. Walking Together Towards a More Inclusive, Participatory and Resilient Paraguay” and facilitated coordination between the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and MoF for the preparation of various reports.

UNDP provided technical assistance to the Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Development Commission of the Senate to incorporate an SDG-focused approach into the analysis of bills and budgetary control activities. However, contextual difficulties, exacerbated by the electoral and political transition processes, were a limiting factor in realizing results from this support. An institutional policy was formulated to integrate the SDGs into the parliamentary activities of the Senate, with the aim of highlighting the impact of bills (positive or negative) on the SDGs, but this policy is still pending internal approval. Similarly, an assessment of the impact of budgetary investment on priority national development indicators has not yet been carried out.

<sup>36</sup> Established in 2016, it is composed of 17 institutions in the country and chaired by the MoFA.

Support provided to both Government and Parliament has been consistent and relevant, but limited in scope compared to the planned CPD. UNDP assisted in the development of multiple knowledge products that provided valuable information for the country, such as the Sustainable Development Report for Paraguay 2021 or the Potential Sources of Financing for SDG Investments study. However, it is not evident that these knowledge products have influenced institutional decision-making regarding public policy or institutional policy decisions (e.g., moving forward legislative or financing proposals, government planning, or decisions on decentralization or service coverage), or that they have been used in a results-based management approach, as proposed by UNDP in the CPD.

UNDP supported Paraguay's System for Monitoring International Recommendations on Human Rights and Sustainable Development (SIMORE Plus), coordinated jointly by MoFA and the Ministry of Justice.<sup>37</sup> This tool, created in 2014, is considered very useful for reporting on the actions of government agencies that make up the Focal Point Network, as well as for consultation by CSOs and the general public. The international interest in this system is evidenced by Paraguay's technical cooperation with different countries in this area. UNDP support strengthened the administration and coordination of this tool, which features easy to search recommendations and the visualization of follow-up measures, although the data is not always up-to-date. UNDP supported training for members of the Focal Points Network from institutions from all three branches of Government. However, more tangible results of the contribution of this monitoring to accountability (both internal and external) or dialogue between the State and different social actors are not clearly visible.<sup>38</sup>

Various interviewees highlighted opportunities for UNDP to localize the SDGs, and generate alliances for SDG financing, given its role in promoting disaggregated information and priority of decentralization. However, progress has been limited, and these areas are yet to be reflected in the utilization of the subnational entry points that UNDP has developed for inter-portfolio actions on SDG localization/ acceleration pilots. UNDP collaborated with the country's financial institutions (National Securities Commission, Central Bank and MoF) on development financing and financial inclusion for vulnerable groups, as well as in the issuance of thematic bonds, although with few results and limited reach to date. The static, conservative nature of the investment sector, and the lack of incentives for the private sector to engage in these mechanisms (they are still associated with low profitability), were factors limiting results.

**Finding 13. Inclusive, efficient and accountable public services.** UNDP consolidated its position as a trusted partner of the Government for multiple institutional strengthening and programme fund management initiatives, which helped to reduce administration times and increase efficiency, quality and transparency. However, there is limited evidence that the most vulnerable populations have greater access to efficient public services as a result of UNDP interventions, with few exceptions.

During this programme cycle, UNDP consolidated its project portfolio as a partner for institutional strengthening with various entities of the Paraguayan State. UNDP offered its capacity to operate swiftly, effectively and transparently to several institutions of the Paraguayan Public Administration from the executive and judicial branches. This significantly contributed to improving infrastructure and equipment, increasing the availability of necessary personnel and, to a more limited extent, providing technical assistance and technological tools. Examples include the provision of judicial infrastructure, the

<sup>37</sup> See the website of the platform: [www.mre.gov.py/simoreplus](http://www.mre.gov.py/simoreplus).

<sup>38</sup> To date, Paraguay has failed to submit five reports from various international mechanisms for the enforcement of human rights. The delay in the submission of reports to these mechanisms is not the direct responsibility of SIMORE, but due to several factors, mainly difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the institutions and even the treaty body system, slowing down all processes.

implementation of electronic voting in the 2023 general election, technological updating of the MoC Single Export Window, the design and implementation of the development and investment plan for the Mauricio José Troche Plant for the treatment of sugarcane as a biofuel, and payment of the MPWC payroll.

Various national counterparts emphasized the ability of UNDP to efficiently procure high-quality goods and services, crucial given that a significant portion of the interventions were financed with national funds (Government cost-sharing). These interventions were driven by demand from beneficiary institutions and implemented through NIM or Support to NIM modalities. However, there is limited evidence of the outcomes of these initiatives in terms of enhancing access of the most vulnerable populations to higher-quality, efficient, and accountable public services.

One exception was the MoF Older People's Programme, where UNDP support significantly increased the number of individuals able to access non-contributory pensions. UNDP provided personnel to expedite a census of older people, thereby improving the declaration processes, processing and recognition of non-contributory pensions, and updating the database as beneficiaries die. The project allowed MoF to reduce the time intervals for visits to all the municipalities in the country, previously every four years, and now completed twice a year. The MoF acknowledged this contribution as crucial for the annual increase in the number of individuals accessing pension payments through banks, and the benefits in terms of local consumption, food and health.

The evaluation team attributes the challenge of finding similar results in the portfolio to a programmatic design issue, which emphasizes institutional strengthening as an end in itself, rather than a means to generate changes for target populations. This hinders the establishment of a theory of change and results framework with appropriate indicators for demonstrating intermediate outcomes. Greater attention to placing final beneficiaries at the centre of the project's objectives would have enabled UNDP to better capitalize on its status as a reference institution for the promotion of governance in the country.

**Finding 14. Access to justice.** During this programme cycle, UNDP improved the material conditions for the delivery of justice in two areas of the country and strengthened SCJ capacity on gender. Shortcomings in the scope and design of the collaboration limited the ability to demonstrate its contribution to access to justice for vulnerable groups, reduction of judicial delays, or the improvement of the judicial response to violence against women.

In view of the urgent need to decongest the administration of justice, deconcentrate judicial and administrative services and improve its institutional image, the SCJ signed an agreement with UNDP in 1996 that has led to the extension and improvement of the country's judicial infrastructure.<sup>39</sup> To date, UNDP has constructed or rehabilitated 40 buildings, initially focusing on Justice of the Peace courts, and later on courts of first and second instance, including courtrooms and courthouses. As a result, Paraguay now has an extensive network of buildings adapted for the administration of justice throughout most of the country, with the exception of the western region (Departments of Boquerón, Presidente Hayes and Alto Paraguay) for which funding is not yet available. During this cycle, UNDP has been supporting works in Salto del Guairá and Capiatá.

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<sup>39</sup> In 1995, the judicial branch had only three buildings in the entire Republic: in Asunción, Encarnación and Ciudad del Este.

For these types of initiatives, UNDP can add value through its capacity to implement agile administrative processes for the management of complex works and equipment bids. The SCJ estimated that, without the support of UNDP, total processing times would quadruple, as evidenced in comparable initiatives carried out without this support. UNDP also brings efficiency and transparency to public investment in justice, providing quality goods to the Government at a competitive price, and guaranteeing transparent use of public funds.<sup>40</sup> To date, approximately 150,000 m<sup>2</sup> has been constructed with no known controversies regarding bidding processes or the quality of the buildings constructed and delivered.

Although there has clearly been a material improvement of the facilities in which justice is delivered, it is difficult to identify the impact on access to justice for vulnerable groups.<sup>41</sup> Decisions on the location of buildings is currently based on population density and the number of cases, and the SCJ periodically reports the number of cases or people served, but there was no baseline for the project and no evidence of a link between increased infrastructure and improved access to or quality of services.<sup>42</sup> Nor was there any systematic monitoring of substantive indicators that can be linked to UNDP contributions (on basic issues such as *lis pendens*, average processing and prosecution time, or the functionality of infrastructure), nor has technical assistance been provided to the SCJ to promote institutional policymaking based on the evolution of such data.<sup>43</sup> This affects monitoring of the CPD's expected results, such as the reduction of judicial delays or the number of pending cases, and improvements in results-based management and a culture of learning and innovation.

With respect to social inclusion, the infrastructure meets the international requirements and standards established for the administration of justice and, in some cases, includes additional services for the community and/or officials such as auditoriums and day care centres, in compliance with the Brasilia Rules on Access to Justice for Vulnerable Persons. There was no citizen consultation on the design of construction projects, but the infrastructures built have significantly improved the surrounding environment, with green areas, leisure and sports facilities, and they have boosted local commerce and urban development.

With regard to environmental impact, although the SCJ reported that the works had integrated environmentally friendly solutions, the administrative procedures for environmental impact assessments, as well as local urban planning, should be reviewed and standardized in order to strengthen natural conservation.<sup>44</sup>

UNDP has actively assisted the Gender Secretariat of the SCJ, including the provision of equipment for handling complaints during the COVID-19 pandemic and technical assistance to develop protocols that address victims of workplace violence. UNDP supported the SCJ to become the first national institution to achieve the Gender Equality Seal. While these contributions were acknowledged, interviewees raised concerns about the lack of evidence of more coordinated efforts and discernible outcomes in enhancing the judicial response to violence against women.

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<sup>40</sup> UNDP executes approximately \$10 million annually from government funds under the Support to NIM modality and at the request of the beneficiary institution.

<sup>41</sup> UNDP recommended carrying out a consultancy to uncover impact information on access justice in substantive revision 13.

<sup>42</sup> Although there has been progress in measurement, the results are inadequate. Previously, measurement consisted of the number of square meters built and the location of the courts did not respond to any criteria. Now, the SCJ can report other short-range substantive indicators (even if not connected to the project) and decide the location of judicial seats according to demographic density and litigation rates.

<sup>43</sup> A citizen satisfaction survey exercise was recently initiated by the SCJ, but it is early in the process.

<sup>44</sup> As a reference, for the construction of the courts at Capiatá, ongoing at the time of this report, approximately 300 trees were cut down.



The SCJ has identified the need to improve the production and analysis of statistics, to work in coordination with other institutions in the system, and to modernize its services. This represents a niche opportunity for UNDP to enhance its contribution and make its results more visible. This could be a first step in the application of a more people-centred approach to justice, as opposed to institution-centred interventions with limited consideration of local contexts and the risks of the most vulnerable being left behind. The recent IEO Evaluation of UNDP Support of Access to Justice explains that the people-centred justice approach, advocated by the Task Force on Justice and the Justice Action Coalition, is based on viewing legal needs as functional, and justice as a means, in the belief that *“people do not need legal services, they need the ends that legal services can achieve”*.<sup>45</sup>

**Finding 15. Transparency and anti-corruption.** UNDP provided technical assistance for the implementation of the National Integrity, Transparency and Anti-Corruption Plan 2021-2025 and the development of a pilot citizen monitoring experience, but to date the scope and results have been limited in scale and continuity. Initiatives would have benefited from a more integrated upstream/ downstream approach and greater emphasis on providing evidence of the impact of improving public services.

UNDP provided technical assistance and equipment to SENAC for the establishment of a business forum under the National Integrity, Transparency, and Anti-Corruption Plan 2021-2025, contributing to creating space for dialogue with the business sector regarding integrity and compliance issues. This contribution is considered relevant because Paraguay is the only country in the region without legislation on the responsibility of legal entities, and this forum is expected to contribute to the incorporation of such an entity into law.

UNDP contributions in other national priority areas for transparency and anti-corruption were more limited. UNDP supported STP to develop the Fifth Open Government Action Plan 2022-2024. It also collaborated in the development of the Guide for Accountability of Local Governments, a resource used by SENAC for training. Despite institutional interest, this support was not consistent, limiting the achievement of more tangible results on transparent and efficient subnational public services. Other SENAC strategies, such as corruption risk mapping in strategic state institutions, the dissemination of citizen service procedures, and the use of transparency portals and complaints channels, were significant opportunities for UNDP to have supported the country.

Through a pilot project driven by its Accelerator Lab, UNDP took an initial step in strengthening the capacity of citizens for social audit activities. In collaboration with the Departmental Government of Misiones and the non-profit organization *Centro de Estudio Ambientales y Sociales*, families and students were engaged in monitoring the school feeding programme in schools and colleges across the Department. The initiative was well-received by stakeholders, although the pilot model was not fully implemented. There was no evidence of the regular use of the tools created (monitoring guide, data collection forms, monitoring platform) or of citizen access to essential data (such as financial details or calculation sources) for determining the budget for the food supply tender (cost per ration/volume of food delivered). Neither was there any evidence that citizen monitoring was conducted periodically in participating schools, for example, by students weighing the food received. Complaints and grievances decreased, although this was not necessarily an indicator of the success of the pilot, since these could be expected to increase or be better substantiated with evidence. Many challenges in terms of the quantity and quality of food were still evident.

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<sup>45</sup> IEO/UNDP (2023). <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/a2j.shtml>.

This pilot experience highlights the need to strengthen comprehensive approaches to address issues of transparency or corruption in the provision of public services, with components to reinforce bottom-up and top-down initiatives. Potential synergies were not fully utilized, such as involving municipalities that managed part of the school feeding programme or engaging local producers to improve and diversify local food sources and reduce costs. The approach of the project document to partnerships with national actors did not materialize, and there was a lack of coordination with institutions and spaces such as SENAC and the Parliamentary Front against Hunger, which could have positively contributed to expanding the scope of, providing continuity for, or institutionalizing the initiative.

**Finding 16. Governance, citizen participation and dialogue.** UNDP provided timely and efficient support to the TSJE for the implementation of electronic voting and the promotion of political participation of underrepresented groups, particularly women. The actions developed by UNDP to improve its collaboration with CSO, strengthen dialogue and promote the political participation of organizations representing vulnerable groups were limited.

UNDP demonstrated adaptability in this area of work, and the results from this programme cycle have allowed it to reposition itself in the field of electoral support. Though not part of the CPD design, and with limited resources, UNDP supported the country to hold its first general elections since the 2019 reform of electoral law. It provided technical assistance and equipped the TSJE, enabling electronic voting, implementing communication actions, and strengthening the participation of underrepresented groups.

In collaboration with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and the European Union, UNDP also supported the Political Training School for Women Leaders, a pre-existing TSJE initiative to promote the political participation of women. UNDP facilitated the hiring of trainers, provided technical assistance to coordination spaces, and developed materials, enabling some graduates of the school to access elected positions in municipalities and departmental governments, though not at national level.

The results of the April 2023 general elections demonstrated an increase in the parliamentary representation of women, but not in their electoral participation. From 2018 to 2023, the percentage of women elected to Congress increased from 15 percent to 22.5 percent, and to the Senate from 18 percent to 24.4 percent. However, the number of women candidates was lower than for the previous general election. Combined with low data on women in high positions at State and local levels, this highlights the ongoing challenge to achieve gender parity and gender alternation in all stages of the electoral process in Paraguay, from the primary elections of each party to the final electoral lists and control by the electoral tribunals.

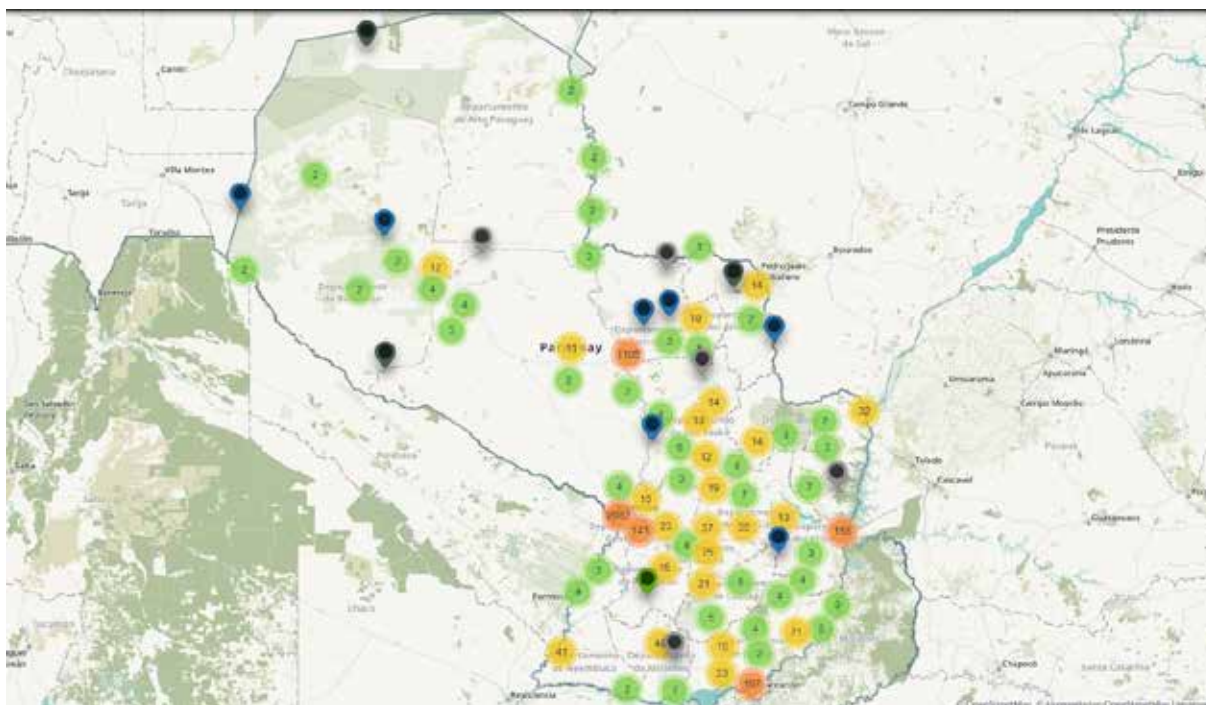
During this cycle, UNDP also collaborated and strengthened dialogue with civil society, but these actions were limited and mostly focused on the *Tavarandu* initiative, a learning cycle on citizen participation focused on the participatory design of public policies through citizen labs. The initiative stood out for its ability to engage teenagers from the district of Natalio, in northeastern Itapúa. Some training and reflection spaces created by UNDP as part of its promotion of Agenda 2030 have been open to CSOs, such as its work with the Senate. However, the country's first VNR was conducted without any consultation with civil society, and for the second VNR, only a few specific mechanisms were initiated.

## 2.6 Cross-cutting areas

**Finding 17. COVID-19.** UNDP created mechanisms and instruments to mobilize funds for the COVID-19 emergency response, increasing the flexibility of its programming and supporting the country (with its own funds and those of IFIs) with the purchase of health supplies and the implementation of communication strategies to counter disinformation. UNDP also contributed to generating knowledge on the possible impacts of the pandemic on the country, and the subsequent socioeconomic situation.

Following the global declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP reacted in a timely manner to immediate needs for health and social support. UNDP demonstrated versatility in implementing the Business Continuity Plan; whereby connectivity and equipment were secured. UNDP Paraguay mobilized its own corporate funds and supported the SDG Paraguay Commission to create a public-private coordination group to channel financial and in-kind donations from the private sector to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Funds for the purchase of biomedical and personal protective equipment were mobilized through support for the *Todos por Paraguay* campaign. The *Wendá* platform enabled the creation of private and citizen solidarity initiatives throughout the country (Map 3), and facilitated the establishment of community canteens and soup kitchens. The platform was recognized as an innovative response to COVID-19 by the Public Innovation Observatory of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

**MAP 2. Distribution of solidarity initiatives of the Wendá platform**



Source: <https://mapa.wenda.org.py>

Due to the exceptional nature of the pandemic, UNDP was able to execute funds from IFIs. However, UNDP has not been able to replicate this model of collaboration due the lack of corporate-level agreements. UNDP supported the Ministry of Health with the purchase of medical supplies with funds from the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, and was instrumental in providing assurances to suppliers. It also supported the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, with funds from the Inter-American Development Bank, to implement communication strategies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and related disinformation.

UNDP complemented emergency support to the health sector with different products and initiatives for socioeconomic development. The strongest synergy between projects emerged with MoF, enabling national authorities to use the system for distributing non-contributory pensions developed under a UNDP project to distribute social assistance during the pandemic. In addition, UNDP contributed to generate knowledge regarding the possible impacts of the pandemic on the country, and the subsequent socioeconomic situation, developing two reports: “Promoting Socio-economic Recovery in Paraguay– Economic Reactivation Strategies during COVID-19” and “Fiscal Sustainability in Times of Pandemic”. However, three years after the pandemic, this evaluation was unable to gather evidence of the degree to which these studies and their recommendations have been translated into concrete policy decisions.

The rapid need for response and adaptation to governmental requests and restrictions created challenges in terms of coherence and implementation. Projects such as “Support to the Response and Recovery COVID-19” showed weak internal coherence, including such disparate initiatives as: i) providing solutions to the challenges of SDG 6;<sup>46</sup> ii) creating integrated information systems for the management of social programmes; iii) supporting the Honourable Chamber of the Senate in the promotion of the SDGs; and iv) strengthening the mechanisms for monitoring the recommendations of Human Rights to the Paraguayan State. Similarly, the implementation of demonstration activities and field interventions, as seen across the Environment and Climate portfolio or in the project with INDERT, suffered delays and difficulties due to restrictions during COVID-19 period.

**Finding 18. Gender equality and women’s empowerment.** An unfavourable policy environment for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country hindered the UNDP contribution to SDG 5.<sup>47</sup> However, due to gender mainstreaming efforts in the programme, recognized with the UNDP Gold Gender Equality Seal, the programme contributed to implementing gender planning processes in key public institutions, improved the institutional response to violence against women and girls, and strengthened women’s political leadership and the economic empowerment of women producers.

This programme cycle coincided with a deterioration in the policy environment for the advancement of gender equality in Paraguay. UNDP made efforts to ensure cross-cutting approaches in a context where the challenge was to ensure that some previous achievements were not reversed. The country experienced social tensions derived from a clash between those advocating progress in human rights and gender equality and those advocating strongly against “gender ideology” and linking it with international agencies and an alleged ‘globalist agenda’. This configured a complex intervention scenario. In its push for a rights-based approach, UNDP, together with UNFPA and UNAIDS, prepared a report on the barriers to the fulfilment of the rights of transgender people in Paraguay, which was highly valued by stakeholders given the vulnerability faced by this group.

<sup>46</sup> SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

<sup>47</sup> SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

UNDP had to rethink its strategies to advance SDG 5. Faced with this controversy, the United Nations system in general, and UNDP in particular, decided not to confront the spokespersons of the critics of “gender ideology” preferring to find spaces and allies with whom to advance Agenda 2030, SDG 5 and gender mainstreaming in public policies. The SCJ showed leadership as the first institution to obtain the Gender Equality Seal for the public sector, promoted by UNDP. Similarly, UNDP efforts for gender planning and trainings were reflected in other national entities which were in the process of certifying their gender action plans and sexual harassment protocols.<sup>48</sup>

UNDP, in partnership with UNFPA and UNICEF, placed specific emphasis on awareness of, and the response to, violence against women and children in the context of COVID-19. The infrastructure and equipment were improved in Regional Women’s Centres and a shelter for victims in Asunción and surrounding areas. Likewise, counselling and communication were provided, but limited in scope. UNDP was able to create a protocol for police action in accordance with Law No. 5777 on the “Integral Protection of Women against all Forms of Violence” and piloted a model for a coordinated emergency response in Asunción with the Ministry of the Interior, though this was not continued or scaled up.<sup>49</sup> A decrease in femicides was observed in Asunción but this could not be attributed to the implementation of the pilot, as a baseline was not established and it was not possible to measure the results.

UNDP supported the Political Training School for Women Leaders of the TSJE, thereby promoting the presence of women graduates in elected positions in municipalities and municipal boards. This political empowerment complemented UNDP efforts to mainstream the promotion of women’s economic empowerment in its initiatives. Labour formalization initiatives integrated perspectives related to gender and masculinities. A women’s platform “Women leaders of the productive chain of sustainable commodities in Paraguay” was developed to provide a needs assessment and training and empower businesswomen, indigenous and rural women. This approach to promote women’s participation and empowerment was repeated in projects such as Green BAAPA Chaco and *Asunción Sustentable*, though there is evidence that low buy-in for gender issues in the private sector constitutes a barrier to integrating the gender approach in the implementation of the Climate and Environment portfolio.

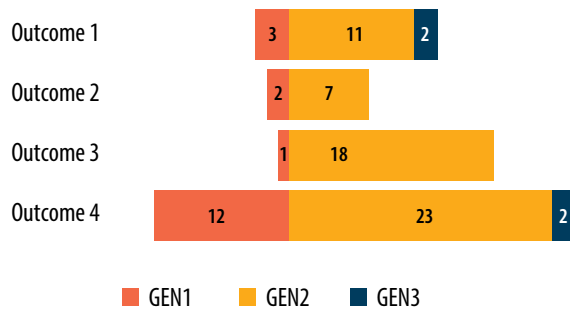
Internally, Paraguay was the first UNDP country office to receive the Gold Gender Equality Seal, in the 2021–2023 certification round. The assessment team for the Seal noted that staff members had internalized and demonstrated ownership of gender equality in their daily work, across programmes, operations, communications and the Accelerator Lab. This meant that the majority of projects (Figure 17) and expenditure (Figure 18) were GEN-2, and that gender equality was considered a significant objective.<sup>50</sup> In terms of the GRES, however, results were mainly gender-targeted, although some projects achieved gender-responsive results, responding to men’s and women’s different needs, and a few were potentially gender-transformative, addressing the root causes of inequalities and discrimination.

<sup>48</sup> MDS, MTESS, MAG, the Civil Service Secretariat, and MoFA.

<sup>49</sup> The protocol resulted in a police action manual provided by the Police Commander as mandatory for use.

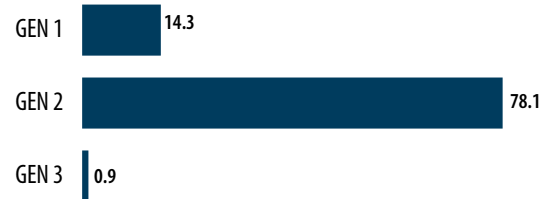
<sup>50</sup> The UNDP Gender Marker measures how much a project invests in gender equality and women’s empowerment. They are assigned by output, and there are four categories: GEN3 (Gender equality as a principle objective); GEN2 (Gender equality as a significant objective); GEN1 (Limited contribution to gender equality); GEN0 (No contribution to gender quality).

**FIGURE 17. Number of projects by gender marker and outcome, 2020–2023**



Source: UNDP ATLAS & Quantum. Data as of February 2024

**FIGURE 18. Expenditure by gender marker in million US\$, 2020–2023**



**Finding 19. Innovation.** UNDP Paraguay made a clear commitment to boost innovation in its programme and add value to its projects. The dynamism and experimentation capacity of the Accelerator Lab were key. The country office now faces the challenge of ensuring continuity and scaling up successful initiatives to achieve the effective integration and mainstreaming of innovative approaches across all programme portfolios.

Programme management support for the integration of innovative approaches to CPD implementation was a feature of this programme cycle. The Accelerator Lab project served as a catalyst for the country office to drive evidence-based policy advice, qualitatively different from previous cycles. Emphasis was placed on rigorous knowledge products, more precisely targeted at the problem they are intended to address and the methodology used to identify the core problem, and assessed by academic peer review to raise the standard of UNDP intellectual leadership.

A participatory sensemaking exercise enabled UNDP to identify those spaces where the Accelerator Lab could effectively contribute, and identified DIM projects as the easiest to initiate. An autonomous exercise to reconstruct the theory of change through causal chains helped to recognize gaps and intermediate outcomes, and three areas of innovation were identified: the public and social sector, business development, and citizen participation. One strength of the Lab was the ability to develop proposals, thus compensating for an internal weakness of the country office given the significant workloads of the regular programme. The commitment of the Lab to participatory methodologies made a novel contribution, shifting the figure of beneficiary to that of participant, changing the focus to the objective, and prioritizing learning over results or impacts.

There have been many innovation initiatives, some with very pioneering components such as the establishment of an action-research team within MTESS, with the aim of generating new data and information on barriers to formalization, or LOCAL, the local capacity-building programme for the garment industry described in Finding 6. The development of joint initiatives with ENI, such as the *Wendá* platform, and *Moirū*, a Community Social Innovation Challenge for the fulfilment of the SDGs, allowed for efforts to decentralize and establish contact with local actors.<sup>51</sup> This led to interventions such as support for women deprived of liberty to develop products with their own branding while in prison, and the promotion of agroecological techniques. Through *Tavarandu*, public officials and communities of the department of Itapúa were trained, and participated in the design of public policies through citizen labs. Two editions

<sup>51</sup> Moiru is promoted by the SDG Paraguay Commission for the development and strengthening of community and university initiatives for the fulfilment of the SDGs.

of the Public Innovators programme, trained more than 100 public officials in innovation methodologies and tools, developing 20 proposals for public services and policies, 10 of which were implemented with financial and technical support from the Acceleration Lab.

In the traditional programmatic areas, innovation was more associated with new programmatic themes. In the promotion of finance for development, UNDP developed the Sustainable Finance Roundtable and, with partners, supported the Securities and Exchange Commission to draft the first regulation that covers sustainable bonds. In order to promote digitization, UNDP supported the TSJE to incorporate electronic voting technology into the electoral system in a pioneering manner in the municipal elections of October 2021.

The challenges of assuming an innovative approach are multiple, and can impact the effectiveness, scope and sustainability of initiatives. For example, the learning orientation clashes with the clientelist culture of beneficiaries of the interventions. This was not always well understood by counterparts, or within UNDP. Similarly, the added value of experimentation can have great potential for the external positioning and visibility of the country office, but contributes little to regular programme implementation and can add to the workload. This has sometimes led to a lack of proactivity from NIM project portfolios, which have a heavy operational management workload. The traditional UNDP business model, with a strong “demand-driven” component from national authorities, has not facilitated the development of evidence-based proposals based on research and experimentation.

**Finding 20. Organizational structure and performance.** UNDP Paraguay improved performance through new COVID-19 management dynamics, a redesigned workspace, and a stronger management unit. The programme’s internal coherence was weakened by numerous scattered initiatives and a history of working in silos on projects, with a high transactional and operational burden. The shift to a portfolio approach presents an opportunity for improvement.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the regular work of UNDP at the beginning of this programme cycle, but the country office was able to react quickly and adapt to new workplace dynamics. The support given during the transition to the teleworking phase was positively valued by the team. The hybrid work model was institutionalized in this cycle, and was reinforced by the remodelling of physical office space. The option for a new, modern and functional space, which promotes horizontal and collaborative work relationships through open spaces, is valued by its users as a good complement to the teleworking option. Staff recognition regarding the value of this initiative has been evidenced through a corporate survey.

UNDP adapted well to changes in the implementation modalities of the programmatic portfolio. Of the three implementation modalities used by UNDP – DIM, NIM, and NIM with UNDP support (NIM supported) – this cycle has seen a significant transition from NIM to NIM-supported projects. This has contributed to additional workloads for the team, which have been successfully managed by the establishment of a management unit, creating greater coordination between the programmes and operations units. 80 percent of the programme’s financial execution is carried out in NIM and NIM-supported projects. The new unit managed processes, payments and financial planning in an integrated manner and, by unifying internal processes, reduced payment processing times and made it possible to transfer capabilities to counterparts, thus improving efficiency. Partners highlighted UNDP management capacity and efficiency in its competitive processes as an added value. However, the transition to Quantum in 2023 posed an additional challenge, initially impacting the efficiency and workload of the team, particularly those dealing with suppliers.

Most of the interventions designed were financed with government cost-sharing funds, at the request of beneficiary institutions, and were implemented in NIM or NIM-supported modalities. The country office dependence on these types of funds hinders any transition from a traditional transactional and operational approach to a more substantive and technical contribution to impact. Law No. 6622 (2020), which establishes measures for the rationalization of public expenditure (known as the Godoy Law) and its regulatory development, prohibits—without retroactive effect—the execution by international entities of contracting processes with funds from Treasury resources, institutional resources or sovereign bonds. This led to multiple general and substantive revisions to the project portfolio of this programme and limited the design of new projects.

Internally, this cycle showed weaknesses in programmatic coherence. On the one hand, the distribution of some projects in the results framework was not always fully aligned with their ultimate objective. Examples include work on non-contributory pensions in Outcome 4 which, by its nature, contributed to changes sought by Outcome 1, or in the case of the Accelerator Lab, a large number of small projects assigned to Outcome 1 made a marked contribution to Outcome 2. On the other hand, due to previous work in silos, intra-programmatic work was rare, for example collaboration between the area of governance and the Accelerator Lab barely benefited from the potential to leverage its recognition among state institutions and provide a more innovative service offering.

Management efforts to move towards a portfolio approach represent an opportunity to strengthen integrated teamwork. It is still a challenge to balance significant, long-standing interventions, extended over time through successive revisions, with more agile initiatives, which may not scale up due to discontinuity in the flow of resources. This is caused by the limited legal framework for the use of public funds by international organizations and the lack of a specific legal framework for international cooperation in the country.

**Finding 21. Planning, monitoring and evaluation.** The current CPD benefited from its alignment with NDP 2030, the development of theories of change, and the presence of management mechanisms for decision-making based on the monitoring and evaluation system. However, weaknesses persist in implementation models, the definition of indicators, access to and quality of data, and the systematic use of evaluation mechanisms to demonstrate impact.

The alignment of the current CPD with NDP 2030 made it possible to defend UNDP performance against critics of the SDGs in the country. In addition, the development of theories of change for each outcome in this cycle strengthened the quality of planning, and increased the utility of the CPD in project design processes. This is relevant because the lack of a theory of change created structural weakness in previous CPDs. However, an important weakness can still be observed in the significant gap between CPD outputs and outcomes. There is a very broad lack of definition of intermediate results in the project portfolios, which makes it difficult to identify gaps for which there is need to innovate or propose development solutions.

The effectiveness and utility of the country office monitoring and evaluation system suffered from weaknesses related to the generation and use of data from national entities and restrictions in the establishment of indicators. Due to the strong preponderance of NIM and NIM-supported projects in the programme, indicators were directed towards national data. However, UNDP had little or no capacity to influence the production or updating of these data. This weakened the results framework and the visibility of UNDP contributions. The results framework did not reflect the variety or breadth of the interventions carried out, and prevented a more in-depth assessment of the results and impacts sought and achieved, beyond activity reports.



The UNDP monitoring and evaluation system faces the challenge of supporting the scale up of pilot projects. Outcome and impact measurement systems are needed to support effective pilots. For example, the pilot for citizen monitoring of the School Feeding Programme identified that the programme may have had an impact on reducing school dropout, but no evidence was generated. No baseline was established for the pilot, nor was there a monitoring and evaluation system to measure results with respect to a counterfactual, which could have enabled the pilot to demonstrate results, disseminate lessons learned and scale the model to other areas or sectors.

The country office has mechanisms to make decisions and share lessons and good practices emerging from monitoring and evaluation processes, such as extended management meetings. However, there is scope to improve and be more systematic in how these mechanisms process evaluation results and transform them into management decisions, at programme and project levels. The ongoing efforts of UNDP to strengthen national evaluation capacity are noteworthy, both through its approach to the Paraguayan Evaluation Network and the promotion of a national capacity assessment by STP.



CHAPTER 3

# CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



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

## 3.1 Conclusions

**Conclusion 1. UNDP Paraguay has continued to be a trusted partner of the Government, able to respond effectively to emergencies such as COVID-19 while supporting national development priorities and international commitments.** It stood out for its adaptability, management efficiency and commitment to innovation. Challenges remain around scaling up initiatives, generating synergy, and accessing development finance.

UNDP is recognized for its positioning as a reliable partner of government institutions. Similar to the previous cycle, this was evident in the provision of management and operational support services for national policies and programmes. In this cycle, UNDP was also able to add value and adapt with agility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, reallocating funds, mobilizing emergency funding and leveraging its international credibility and procurement capacity. The Accelerator Lab has positioned UNDP as a driver of digitalization and social and public innovation. UNDP was also instrumental in helping the country meet its international commitments, in updating the NDP 2030, which was strongly aligned with the SDGs, and in submitting the first updated Nationally Determined Contribution in 2021.

UNDP made clear and continuous efforts to broaden and strengthen partnerships throughout the period. This resulted in a wide range of partners, making it possible to explore and promote new initiatives, and complement programme areas in which planned projects did not materialize with relevant stakeholders. The office effectively managed a rapid expansion in the number of initiatives, but there is scope for improvement to boost synergy within the programme. The transition to a portfolio approach is an opportunity to improve this. There is an imbalance between historical programmes, mainly focused on institutional support, which sustain the business model, and novel or experimental initiatives, with strong transformational design but limited budget, scale and scope. In addition to the mobilization of national funds, UNDP stood out for its support to mobilize development finance to support the environment and climate through vertical funds. The lack of corporate financial agreements between UNDP and IFIs have been a limiting factor in its ability to mobilize other types of funds at country level.

**Conclusion 2. UNDP support to social protection and socioeconomic development was valuable, yet limited in reaching the most vulnerable population.** UNDP capacity for adaptation and innovation to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 was demonstrated. Relevant institutional areas were strengthened with information systems and knowledge products jointly developed with government institutions, but some work with sectoral lead ministries was left out of this cycle, limiting the achievement of some planned objectives.

The CPD placed strong emphasis on social protection and socioeconomic development initiatives to reach the most vulnerable. The best examples of improvements in the provision of quality universal services were the promotion of the older people's programme and the capacity-strengthening of INDERT and SNC to develop their missions. Programme implementation mostly focused on institutional strengthening, the development of information systems and knowledge products which, although of high technical quality and institutional relevance, were limited in their ability to directly reach the most vulnerable population.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge to which UNDP responded by adapting existing projects, generating new initiatives and partnerships (MoH, Social Cabinet of Presidency) and promoting innovation. Specialist hospitals were supported with the provision of biomedical equipment. UNDP was able to leverage its added value in international procurement to help meet the supply chain challenges of the period. The drive for innovation led to the development of virtual participatory platforms such as *Wendá*, more robust information systems such as SIIS, and data visualization platforms such as *e-Heka*. However, the reduction in joint work with MDS or MAG during this cycle, due to changing priorities, was a limiting factor in the scale and scope of planned initiatives to improve social protection or family economic development in rural areas.

**Conclusion 3. UNDP is recognized for its added value in strengthening institutions responsible for protecting the environment and combating climate change.** Its contributions have enabled Paraguay to comply with international environmental obligations, improve its information systems and biodiversity protection, and promote structural changes in the areas of urban sustainability and agricultural and livestock production. Improvements in the management of natural capital are slow in the face of the country's growing vulnerability to climate change and its challenges.

UNDP was able to deploy a programme around the environment and climate change with a portfolio approach that allowed the promotion of catalytic processes for medium- and long-term structural changes in rural and urban environments. In addition to strengthening MADES and INFONA to fulfil their national functions and international obligations, UNDP promoted interinstitutional and multilevel dialogues, such as platforms for sustainable meat and soybean production, and the formulation of urban development plans for AMA and other municipalities. However, the lack of full buy-in from some key actors, such as some parties of the productive sector and MAG, weakened the effectiveness of these efforts and hindered the materialization of concrete results, particularly in terms of sustainable production, the reduction of GHG emissions and deforestation.

The openness of UNDP to work on sustainable cities was particularly relevant in generating environmental benefits in terms of transport, solid waste management and green infrastructure. This diversification of the climate and environment portfolio has enabled greater access to climate finance. It was directly connected with the drive for energy transformation promoted by UNDP in its 2020 National Report on Human Development and Energy. The need to promote disaster risk reduction and climate resilience was highlighted as a weakness in the current programme, given the rapidly increasing vulnerability of rural, indigenous and Latino populations, particularly women, girls and older people, to extreme weather events such as droughts, fires and floods.

**Conclusion 4. UNDP enabled the institutional strengthening of the executive, judicial and electoral branches of Government, thus supporting the implementation of NDP 2030 and the promotion of the SDGs.** An expanded portfolio of projects supported institutional efficiency and transparency. The wide diversity of initiatives, highly transactional project approaches and weak linkages with other UNDP programmatic areas limited the achievement of more transformative, sustainable and visible results and impacts on people's lives.

Programming efforts and the search for niches of opportunity have expanded areas of action in the field of governance. Long-standing lines of action, such as access to justice or the strengthening of MoF, have been maintained and improved, and new lines of action have been incorporated, such as support for electoral processes and the TSJE. This resulted in a higher volume of financial transactions handled by the area, though still below that originally planned, with a high operational burden related to payments and

acquisitions. The recognition of contributions to institutional strengthening, efficiency and transparency, provides an opportunity to increase the scope of interventions, and better define and measure changes in target populations.

UNDP mobilized its own funds to promote greater substantive and transformational contributions in governance issues and the diversification of partnerships. These ranged from supporting the SDG Paraguay Commission and strengthening the SIMORE plus system, to supporting national integrity policies and the work of SENAC, and promoting finance for development initiatives, such as the first regulation to cover sustainable bonds. However, most of the initiatives were characterized by insufficient localization, weak coordination between institutions and with non-state actors, and limitations in the generation of evidence of results and possible impacts. Actions to improve collaboration and strengthen dialogue with civil society, especially with organizations representing the most vulnerable groups, have been *ad hoc*.

**Conclusion 5. Through a systematic mainstreaming of gender equality, UNDP strengthened women's participation and the integration of a gender perspective in the programme.** A complex context hindered progress, but through different initiatives UNDP promoted gender best practices in key public institutions and addressed the differentiated needs of women in areas such as security and political and economic empowerment. Nevertheless, these issues remain major challenges for the country.

Leadership to advance and mainstream gender equality in the programme have been key to UNDP achievements for gender results. This programme cycle was characterized by an adverse socio-political environment for the promotion of gender equality and the expansion of rights. UNDP designed a highly ambitious programme to reach the most vulnerable populations, including women, youth and indigenous peoples. Most interventions have had difficulty reaching these vulnerable groups, or demonstrating this reach, given their strong focus on institutional strengthening and operational support. However, continued efforts to integrate a gender equality perspective into this cycle have enabled relevant contributions, such as training on gender and public policies, political participation and gender mainstreaming for public institutions under the Gender Seal process. All of this work has been recognized through the Gold Gender Equality Seal accreditation.

UNDP played a leading role in promoting the fight against GBV and the development of a rapid response, protection and shelter system, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, it promoted women's leadership, through support to the TSJE. Though initially not planned, support to INDERT significantly transformed its gender perspective, promoted the generation of gender data, and facilitated women's access to land titles and ownership, addressing a root cause of inequality in the country.

## 3.2 Recommendations and management response

### RECOMMENDATION 1.



**Based on the rich historical collaboration with state institutions in Paraguay, UNDP should focus its strategies and resources on results with greater impact.** UNDP should help to ensure that institutional strengthening translates into positive changes in the lives of the most vulnerable. Partnerships and programmatic resources should drive results-based management and communication for development, to enable full national ownership of initiatives and contribute to paradigm shifts among key stakeholders. UNDP should continue to diversify its cooperation framework, to expand its added value and minimize risks.

- For institutional strengthening projects, UNDP should emphasize people-centred approaches in its theories of change and continue to monitor the expected impact on people's lives. While leveraging current strategies, the focus should remain on fostering innovation, decentralizing public services, and strengthening coordination with key institutions, the private sector and civil society, for enhanced effectiveness and sustainability. The country office should build on the experience of the Environment and Climate Change team in using a portfolio approach, expanding this approach to the remaining programmatic areas, to improve internal coherence, leverage synergy and increase added value.
- UNDP should seek to have a more transformative and tangible impact in terms of development outcomes, focusing on measurable progress for the most vulnerable populations and localities, and ensuring that this can be evidenced. Subnational entry points should be used for inter-portfolio actions, accelerating the localization of NDP 2030, in alignment with the SDGs. The monitoring and evaluation system should be strengthened for decision-making. Indicators should be aligned with objectives, national capacity for data management should be bolstered, and results-based management should be promoted to minimize resistance to change and enhance sustainability.
- The changes initiated need to be deepened to add substantive value to the cooperation framework, which at the request of the Government focused on the provision of contracting and procurement services, through NIM or NIM-supported projects. At the corporate level, UNDP should facilitate relationships with IFIs, and a develop framework for this at country programme level. UNDP should continue to attract development financing and diversifying the donor portfolio to mitigate risks.

### Management response: Fully accepted



The design of the new CPD will be leveraged to ensure results-based management with substantive impact across the portfolio, through monitoring and evaluation activities, promoting positive changes in the lives of the most vulnerable and strengthening communication for development.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
1.1 Ensure the inclusion of accurate and appropriate monitoring and evaluation activities that facilitate the follow-up and accountability of the results committed to in the CPD 2025-2029.	01/02/2025	Paraguay Office
1.2 Consolidate the focus of the recommendation through its inclusion in the new CPD.	01/02/2025	Paraguay Office

## RECOMMENDATION 2.



**UNDP should promote a systemic approach to poverty reduction and socioeconomic development.** This should facilitate and strengthen synergy with other areas of the programme and promote integration between relevant public institutions, other agencies of the United Nations system, the private sector and IFIs. The UNDP focus should be on expanding coverage and improving the quality of programmes implemented with key institutions responsible for serving the most vulnerable populations. Innovation resources should be cross-cutting and integrated, to add value to the programme as a whole.

- UNDP should provide clarity on its national and regional inclusive growth offer, and its added value and contribution to protect and empower people, especially those in situations of poverty or vulnerability. This should strengthen the programme's internal and external synergies. UNDP could clearly explain how it can add value to key reforms underway in the country - in the areas of employment, taxation, pensions and social security.
- UNDP should strengthen its relationship with key institutions to expand access to, and improve and assess the quality of, public services for the most vulnerable. These include MDS, the Cabinet Technical Unit, MTESS, MoIC, the National Institute of Statistics or the Paraguayan Institute of Indigenous People. UNDP should make efforts to mobilize resources to provide continuity to the technical assistance agreements made with national institutions, local governments and other actors in the area of socioeconomic inclusion during this programme cycle.
- UNDP should build on the learning cycles promoted by the SDG Accelerator Lab, particularly those related to socioeconomic inclusion, to promote a systemic approach to poverty reduction and strengthen its entire programme. It should apply these lessons to new initiatives in the areas of entrepreneurship and employability, the portfolio approach and the promotion of inclusive value chains, with a focus on gender equity and rights.

### Management response: **Fully accepted**



The design of the new CPD will be used to provide clarity on the supply of services in the areas of governance, socioeconomic development and social protection, giving continuity to partnerships with the new authorities and considering the national priorities that have been set, mainly in inclusive development programmes (economic-social) and through the portfolio approach, related projects and innovation.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
2.1 Design of a portfolio with a focus on inclusive development and support for social programmes that contribute to poverty reduction and improve state services through their arrival in the territory, digitalization and innovation.	31/12/2024	Paraguay Office
2.2 Consolidate the focus of the recommendation through its inclusion in the new CPD.	01/02/2025	Paraguay Office



### RECOMMENDATION 3.



**In the design of the next environment and climate portfolio, the areas of access to water, disaster risk reduction, resilience and food security for vulnerable communities should be integrated as cross-cutting elements.**

The promotion of sustainable production through multisectoral dialogue spaces should be reinforced, and complemented with broader initiatives for forest conservation, protection and the creation of protected areas. UNDP should continue to promote low-emission development and access to climate finance.

- The country's climate vulnerability requires continuous effort to ensure access to water and manage disaster risks (droughts, floods and forest fires), as well as to ensure food security for vulnerable communities. Strengthening responsiveness to manage these issues is especially relevant at the subnational level and in rural indigenous and Latino communities.
- UNDP should facilitate the mobilization of sustainable production and climate-smart agriculture and livestock initiatives by strengthening its relationship with MAG and the private sector. Clear economic incentives for the productive sector could be promoted, and economic benefits should be distributed to indigenous and vulnerable communities for the conservation of forested areas. UNDP should continue to seek sources of climate finance to help reduce poverty and vulnerability in the country.
- UNDP should promote low-emission initiatives and renewable energies. In Paraguay, urban electrification and the promotion of sustainable practices in industrial sectors offer high potential in terms of impact and access to climate finance.

### Management response: **Fully accepted**



The specific thematic lines will be determined in the design processes of the Cooperation Framework and CPD, in accordance with the priorities defined by the Government and other relevant actors at the national level.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
3.1 Present the recommendation received in the joint work spaces that involve the Paraguayan State during the design of the new CPD, for timely prioritization and adequate approach.	15/06/2024	Paraguay Office
3.2 Consolidate the approach agreed in point 3.1 of the recommendation through its inclusion in the new CPD.	01/02/2025	Paraguay Office

## RECOMMENDATION 4.



**In the design of the next programme, UNDP should strengthen its approaches to equality between women and men to drive further progress and generate and promote evidence.** It should continue to promote change in the areas of economic and political empowerment of women and the prevention of violence against women. It should integrate a stronger human rights-based approach, focused on building citizenship for the exercise of rights, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable groups.

- The design of the next CDP should pay specific attention to the formulation of theories of change and how they integrate approaches to gender equality, equity and human rights. In addition to continued institutional strengthening, UNDP should expand its relationship with academia and CSOs to generate evidence and counteract misinformation on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the drive for equality between women and men in the country. It should also strengthen interagency ties and promote a joint strategy for the promotion of SDG 5.
- Women's economic autonomy should continue to be strengthened. The good work initiated with INDERT to improve their information systems and thus support women's access to land ownership should continue, and provides a good example to replicate. The new UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025 indicates that UNDP should pay attention to financing for gender equality, both by leveraging fiscal and financial flows to advance women's and men's equality, and by directly supporting initiatives that enhance women's financial empowerment. Women's political empowerment should continue to be promoted and UNDP should capitalize on its collaboration with the SCJ and other national institutions to promote a national pact for equality and non-violence against women. In the area of justice, the current support to the SCJ should be complemented by a focus on reducing delays and improving the judicial response to violence against women.
- In a regional context of stagnation on human rights, the expansion of organized crime, increased social conflict and democratic setbacks, UNDP should carry out prospective analyses to plan work strategies linked to the opening of spaces, the improvement of dialogue and citizen participation, and the protection of human rights and their defenders.

### Management response: **Fully accepted**



The specific thematic lines will be determined in the design processes of the Cooperation Framework and CPD, in accordance with the priorities defined by the Government and other relevant actors at the national level. The country office is in a position to promote women's economic and political empowerment and the prevention of violence against women, thus contributing to gender equity, through all ongoing initiatives.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
4.1 Design of a gender and other inclusive development project to operationalize the recommendation, based on the priorities of the Paraguayan State.	31/12/2024	Paraguay Office
4.2 Consolidate the approach agreed in point 4.1 of the recommendation through its inclusion in the new CPD.	01/02/2025	Paraguay Office

\* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.

# ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/23399>

**Annex 1.** Evaluation terms of reference.

**Annex 2.** Evaluation framework.

**Annex 3.** Country at a glance.

**Annex 4.** Documents consulted.

**Annex 5.** List of projects reviewed.

**Annex 6.** Status of Country Programme Document outcome and output indicators matrix.

**Annex 7.** Country programme performance rating.

**Annex 8.** Country programme selected GIS Maps analysis.







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