



Independent
Evaluation
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United Nations Development Programme



KEY INSIGHTS and LESSONS on IMPLEMENTATION of UNDP programmes in the Caribbean, including through multi-country offices



A REGIONAL SYNTHESIS OF UNDP EVALUATIONS

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UNDP Independent Evaluation Office.

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Acronyms

CFIR	Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research
DIM	Direct Implementation Modality
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
JCCCP	Japan-Caribbean Climate Change Partnership
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCO	Multi-country office
MSME	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprise
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
RBLAC	Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
RHLAC	Regional Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SVG	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme





INTRODUCTION

This report is a qualitative synthesis of evaluations of UNDP projects and programmes conducted in the Caribbean region from 2015 to 2023. It was developed by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as part of its commitment to generate lessons to improve decision-making and programme management. The following section includes a synthesis of the main lessons in relation to the synthesis questions.

Purpose, scope and methodology

An evaluation synthesis is the systematic collation and analysis of existing, quality-assessed evaluation evidence in order to develop new findings, lessons and insights.¹ This is expected to inform strategic, policy and programme decision-making.

This subregional synthesis focuses on evaluations of UNDP work in the Caribbean subregion and aims to shed light on how Caribbean multi-country offices (MCOs) and country offices can most effectively and efficiently implement their capacity development programming. This is expected to enhance learning and facilitate evidence-informed UNDP decision-making and programme delivery in the Caribbean subregion.

IEO appointed a team of three staff members and two consultants to conduct the synthesis work in consultation with the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC) (see Annex 1 for more detail on the synthesis approach).

Synthesis Questions

1. What lessons can be drawn regarding the barriers and facilitators for UNDP in implementing capacity development in the Caribbean?
2. How were MCOs able to provide support for countries without an in-country UNDP presence or office? What factors enabled or hindered their contribution?

The synthesis aggregated evidence from evaluation reports to develop lessons learned, which were unpacked to identify key enablers and barriers. A total of 144 evaluation reports were identified for inclusion, and 51 were included in the final sample.

An adaptation of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) was used to guide analysis of the factors that influenced UNDP work [1, 2]. The adaptation uses the five domains of the original Framework, contextualized for this synthesis.²

- The **intervention domain** covers internal and external capacity development activities in the 25 Caribbean countries covered by UNDP RBLAC.
- The **inner setting domain** refers to country offices and MCOs.

¹ UNEG <https://www.uneval.org/document/detail/2972>

² See Table A2 in the methodological annex for more information identifying the relevant constructs, under each domain, included in the synthesis.

- The **outer setting domain** represents the international environment, and the national environment for the country where the intervention is taking.
- The **actors domain** refers to the role and characteristics of different individuals and institutions involved in capacity development (this differs from the ‘individuals’ domain of CFIR).
- Finally, the **implementation process** covers the activities and strategies used by country offices and MCOs to support execution.

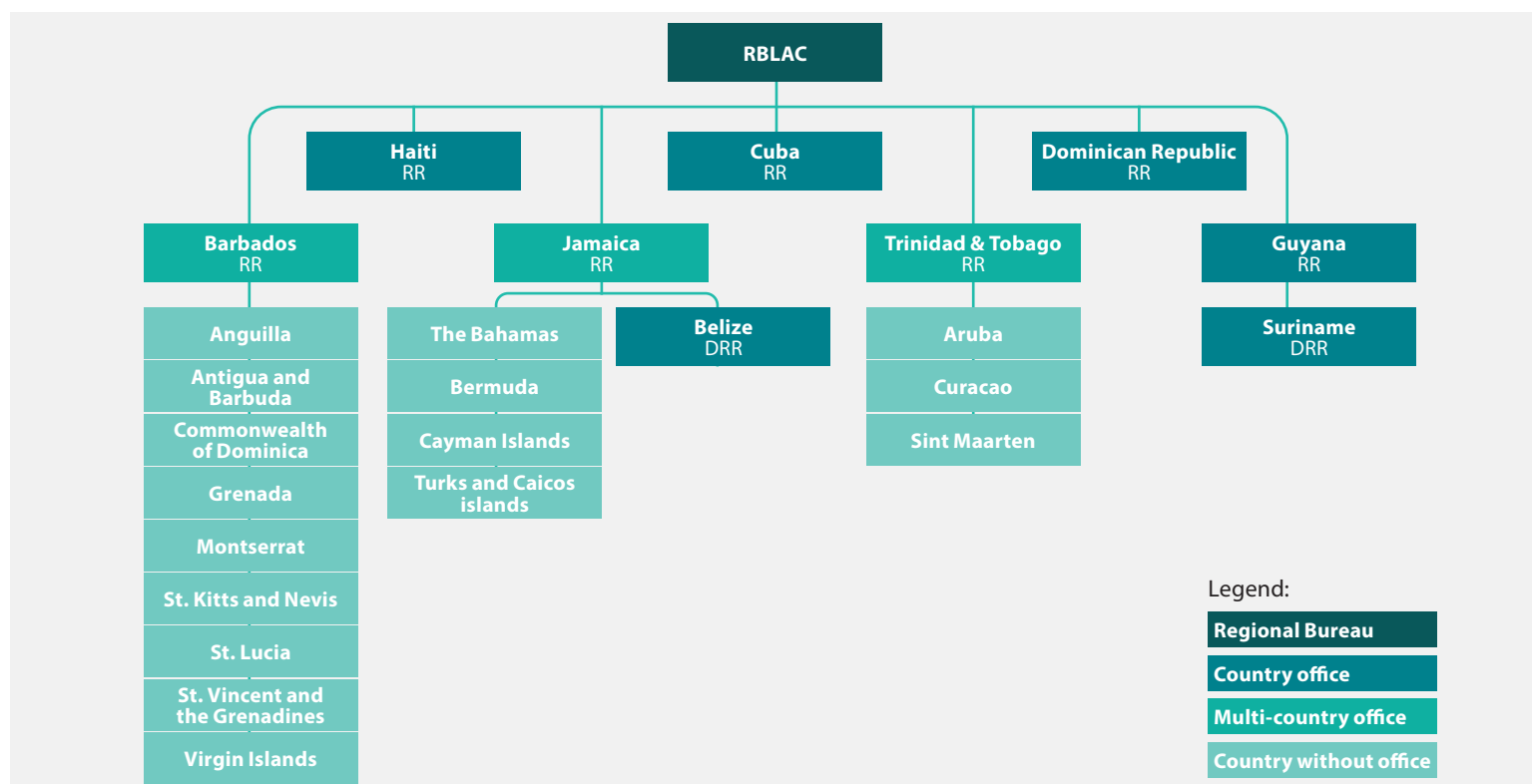
The synthesis encountered a significant limitation in terms of an evidence gap relating to reporting on the MCOs. Only six evaluation reports explored the extent of MCO support to countries, four on the Barbados MCO, one on Jamaica MCO and one on RBLAC. This means that lessons related to MCOs have more limited breadth and depth. Full details of the methodology and sources are provided in the annexes of this report.

The UNDP programme in the Caribbean subregion

The Caribbean is a subregion of Latin America, encompassing the Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, Bahamian Archipelago (Commonwealth of The Bahamas and the British Overseas Territory of the Turks and Caicos Islands), and the surrounding coasts, located between the North Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Additionally, the coastlines of some Central and South American mainland countries, including Belize, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, are considered part of the Caribbean region.

The UNDP presence in the Caribbean covers 25 countries, under RBLAC, including six country offices (Belize, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti and Suriname) and three MCOs (Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago).

FIGURE 1. Structure of UNDP presence in the Caribbean



KEY STRATEGIC INSIGHTS





This section presents the key insights on critical issues relating to the synthesis questions, gained from a deep dive into the evaluations. These insights contain deeper understandings and perceptions gained from analysing the evidence, interpreting patterns, connections, and underlying meanings within the synthesized evidence. They are expected to guide decision-making or action and provide valuable understanding on possible implications.

INSIGHT I:

When implementation modalities are appropriately flexible to match the context, they enhance responsiveness, capacity and sustainability.

The success of UNDP often hinged on the choice and flexibility of implementation modalities – national or direct. Adapting implementation approaches to suit project needs, local contexts, and evolving circumstances enabled UNDP to respond more effectively to challenges, ensuring adaptability and greater responsiveness to local needs. This flexibility includes selecting between national implementation modality (NIM) and direct implementation modality (DIM) based on the phase of the project, stakeholder capacity, and external factors. Where local entities take the lead, NIM projects can strengthen local systems, enhance ownership and develop sustainable institutional capacity. Conversely, where local capacity is limited, DIM allows UNDP to directly manage projects, which can ensure efficiencies. This highlights the importance of modality selection and flexibility in determining and realizing capacity development goals.

INSIGHT II:

Multi-country implementation modalities can foster regional collaboration and more effectively address shared development goals.

The choice of implementation modalities for multi-country interventions plays a crucial role in facilitating regional collaboration and harmonization. Leveraging the regional presence and expertise of UNDP through strategic use of implementation modalities can promote cross-country learning, enable the sharing of best practices, and allow country offices to address common challenges more effectively. This highlights the value of regional approaches in addressing countries' development goals.

INSIGHT III:

Flexible and context-sensitive approaches and implementation modalities play a critical role in emergency and recovery contexts, a need reinforced by external factors and funding challenges.

External factors, whether political, social, environmental or economic, significantly affect project implementation. Additionally, the availability and timely and realistic allocation of funding, and the engagement of governments in project financing, are critical for the success of capacity development activities. Notably, the effectiveness of UNDP crisis responses, such as in the aftermath of natural disasters or during the COVID-19 pandemic, was partly determined by the flexibility to rapidly adapt modalities (from NIM to DIM) or combine different approaches (Hybrid NIM/DIM). The flexibility to adapt in crisis situations, by repurposing funds and adjusting to more agile (fast-track) operational processes and procedures, enabled UNDP to deliver timely and relevant support to affected communities.





KEY LESSONS from
UNDP WORK in
the **CARIBBEAN** 





This section presents lessons which are specific takeaways drawn from the synthesis of the triangulated evidence and findings of evaluations. The lessons represent actionable knowledge derived from the evidence and focus on practical applications, to inform future actions, strategies or approaches.

LESSON 1

Strategic context alignment and realistic planning and funding for results.

Initiatives that were able to strategically align regional strategies with the specific needs of the country, while realistically allocating time and funding to address capacity development requirements, show better results.

Evaluations noted that a balanced project design, that considers regional strategies as well as specific country needs, was critical to foresee and overcome barriers. Significant barriers identified, such as time underestimation and overambitious planning, highlighted the need for realistic timelines and activities. In some cases, the project planning process has underestimated the intricacies of capacity-building requirements, as well as the budget for risks, the team workload, the planned duration of the activities and external influences impacting implementation [3, 4].

The underestimation of time often arose from lack of attention to the complexity of implementation activities. Evaluations emphasise the need to recognise the requirements for capacity-building of national counterparts and ensuring the transfer of knowledge on United Nations project management and operational procedures. For example, a project to strengthen national capacity to ensure the sustainability of the protected areas system in Belize was only planned for three years, with provision for a one-year extension [5]. This was assessed to be insufficient to complete all the necessary activities and achieve sustainable results. Similarly, the time allocated for implementation of a project to build capacity for reforming HIV laws and policies in Jamaica was considered insufficient, given the transformative scope of the expected changes. In the Barbados 'Low-Carbon Development Path' project, stakeholders reported that project delays resulted from an underestimation of the time needed to create procurement plans. In some cases, backlogs and delays were due to the limited capacity of national implementing partners to undertake procurement and contract management in a timely and transparent manner [6].

Another critical barrier identified in several project evaluations was the overambitious planning of activities for the time and finances available in the project design [3, 4]. The evaluation of a project for developing capacity for energy efficiency and security in Jamaica cited insufficient funding for planned activities as a major challenge. This resulted in the cancellation or delay of activities, and only partial delivery. Also in Jamaica, the evaluation of a project to strengthen the operational and financial sustainability of the national protected area system noted that the design of project activities did not properly account for local capacity, needs and opportunities. The evaluation of the juvenile court project in Trinidad and Tobago noted that the magnitude of the work, due to the high fragmentation of the existing judicial system, was not fully understood at the beginning of the project (e.g., laws needed to be modified to implement the project), resulting in overambitious planning [7].

Evaluations emphasized the importance of considering external and contextual factors during planning and implementation. The evaluation of a disaster risk and energy access management project in Barbados reported that the complexity of licensing processes and implementation conducted by the private sector

were underestimated. Two evaluations underscored the importance of considering context-specific complexities during project planning. The first, assessing a project aimed at reducing water use conflicts, emphasized this need. The second, examining the Japan-Caribbean Climate Change Partnership (JCCCP), a multi-country initiative spanning eight nations, highlighted how the diverse needs and unique contexts of each participating country significantly impacted project implementation. Both evaluations stressed that these complexities should be carefully addressed in the planning phase to enhance project effectiveness.³ Additionally, this evaluation reported that it was critical to adopt a balanced project design that would follow regional outcomes as well as the specific country-driven components.

LESSON 2

Clear theory of change and timely monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for data-informed decision-making.

With a well-defined theory of change and effective planning, M&E can enhance the coherence and effectiveness of initiatives. It is equally important to ensure the allocation of sufficient time for data collection, monitoring and analysis, to empower staff to make data-informed decisions.

Theory of change

Evaluations noted that a solid and explicit theory of change enabled clear communication of the rationale connecting the interventions of a project to the desired outcomes, and providing clear targets and indicators to measure progress and success. The lack of such a theory of change was considered a critical barrier to programme management, according to evaluations of a country programme, and UNDAF, and several single and multi-country projects [8]. For example, the evaluation of the Suriname Country Programme (2017-2021) noted that the absence of a coherent theory of change influenced a disconnect between the intended logic and actual delivery of the programme, and affecting its overall relevance. The evaluation of a primary healthcare initiative in Trinidad and Tobago reported that some of the assumptions used for developing the theory of change were not valid, resulting in limited progress towards the final objective of more effective and efficient health services.

M&E system and results indicators

The existence and application of a robust M&E system has proven to facilitate implementation. The evaluation of a project to strengthen democratic governance in the Dominican Republic reported that national and subnational governments valued having a good M&E system in place, because it allowed them to compare data and demonstrate results [9]. The evaluation of a project to safeguard Jamaican biodiversity showed that having a planned M&E process at the project design stage facilitated the use of standard methodologies, in accordance with UNDP and Global Environment Facility (GEF) procedures. This provided accurate feedback for informing decisions on the specific activities conducted [10].

Poorly implemented M&E systems, data of insufficient quality, and challenges with data collection processes have presented significant barriers to project design and implementation [3, 4]. The evaluation of the Trinidad and Tobago juvenile court project reported that project staff needed to reduce the time spent

³ The eight countries participating in the project were Belize, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, the Republic of Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Republic of Suriname.

on implementing the project in order to meet reporting requirements for them to produce several reports for each partner agency. The evaluation of the UNDP multi-country Future Tourism project, implemented in 10 countries in the region and focused on providing support to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the tourism sector impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, reported challenges from the lack of reliable data systems or processes. Similarly, the evaluation of a project in the Dominican Republic reported delays in the implementation of some activities due to the lack of registries, databases, information, and sex-disaggregated data across different institutions, which can be very expensive and time-consuming but help to ensure that no one is left behind and maybe even to reach the furthest behind. The evaluation of environmental trends and the implementation of a multilateral environmental agreement in Antigua and Barbuda noted that, though participating agencies collected data, they were usually understaffed and lacked the technological capacity to effectively manage and continuously collect and upload data in the system.

Difficulties in selecting appropriate, valid and measurable indicators were reported as another barrier [12, 13]. The evaluation of a malnutrition prevention project in the Dominican Republic noted ambiguity and variation in the stated objectives, results and associated indicators across project documents. This led to confusion about the project's objectives and scope. Similarly, the evaluation of the Dominican Republic UNDAF 2018-2022 noted difficulties in measuring project results because several of the indicators were impact-, rather than output-, oriented, requiring a longer time-horizon to see impacts attributable to the execution of the project [14].

Harmonizing donor reporting

Several evaluations noted multiple, redundant and sometime overlapping reporting requirements from project donors, and recommended that the donor community reflect on this. One regional project encountered difficulties in responding to different reporting forms by each donor government, which could have been addressed at the design phase through better harmonization. Similar issues were raised in Guyana, where there was a lack of harmonization in procurement monitoring and results reporting which challenged programme delivery [15].

LESSON 3

Inclusive stakeholder engagement and coordination has costs and benefits.

The successful design and implementation of development initiatives, and highest chances for sustainable results, requires the involvement of an inclusive mix of stakeholders. To identify the right mix of stakeholders, it is important to be mindful of who is likely to be left behind, and consider the costs and benefits of broadening stakeholder engagement and coordination. While inclusivity improves buy-in and the likelihood of sustainability, it also adds complexity. This means that if it is not properly planned for, it creates inefficiencies and slows down implementation.

One critical barrier identified was the lack of engagement from essential stakeholders, or an imbalanced representation of stakeholder groups, during the design phase [3]. The evaluation of a project to build capacity for HIV-related law and policy in Jamaica noted that the project design phase did not properly incorporate faith-based organizations who, due to their importance and power in the country, should have been considered equally to parliamentary and judiciary officials. The evaluation of a regional JCCCP

project implemented in eight countries in the region reported that beneficiaries would have liked to have been involved in the planning and design phase of the project. An evaluation of a project supporting electoral processes in Haiti provided valuable insights into addressing stakeholder engagement challenges. By partnering with agencies such as UN Women and UNESCO, UNDP successfully broadened women's participation in the project. This inclusive approach not only enhanced stakeholder representation but also increased project efficiency [16].

Involving multiple actors in project implementation usually increased complexity to of the process, because of the need to coordinate between different entities and operational frameworks. The mid-term evaluation of the multi-country JCCCP project reported significant delays in project implementation due to the complexity resulting from the number of partners involved, and the coordination required between different country offices with their individual operational frameworks [17]. Similarly, the evaluation of a coastal protected area management project in Suriname reported significant difficulties experienced by the Ministry of Physical Planning, Land and Forest Management due to the multiple institutions involved in the financial and operational management of coastal areas which had not all been incorporated into the project implementation [18].

Several evaluations recognised that cooperation with more than one implementing partner (including other United Nations agencies) could enrich the project implementation process. For example, in Cuba, the coordination of multisectoral actors (including civil society organizations) at various levels was recognized as a factor enabling successful implementation, particularly for developing the sexually transmitted infection/ HIV strategy [19]. Similarly, the evaluation of a project to strengthen environmental regulations in Guyana's gold-mining sector reported that coordination across different institutions facilitated collaboration across sectors and institutions to promote and incorporate environmental issues in national planning [20].

Several evaluations reported that UNDP facilitated partnerships with multiple stakeholders, including other United Nations agencies and governments. For example, the evaluation of the Barbados multi-country programme reported that UNDP provided technical assistance with other United Nations agencies and non-resident agencies, with mixed feedback from partners on the perceived quality and effectiveness of the partnership. The substantial regional presence of UNDP, and its ability to mobilize resources, were viewed favourably. However, the partnerships formed were perceived as more opportunistic than strategic, particularly with regard to private sector involvement.

LESSON 4

Mutually beneficial partnerships facilitate political will and national ownership. The relevance and success of UNDP initiatives are heightened when they adapt to changing circumstances in a timely manner, and they facilitate political will and national ownership through durable and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Responsiveness to changing context

In a number of cases, post-election changes in government, and associated changes at cabinet level and pauses in activity, affected project implementation detrimentally. The evaluation of the Barbados multi-country office programme reported that general elections led to government restructuring,



which delayed the delivery of some projects [4]. In the Dominican Republic, cabinet changes affected the continuity of UNDP projects, because government counterparts changed [11]. In Haiti, the protracted nature of electoral cycles (interrupted by political uncertainty and contestations, change of election dates, etc.) more than doubled the lifespan of a project supporting the electoral process [16]. However, most evaluations noted that projects remained relevant and effective by adjusting to changing circumstances and providing reliable support, while maintaining accountability and integrity standards.

Factors in the domestic economic and financial context of countries (notably the rate of inflation and the size of the economy), and in some cases the imposition of external economic sanctions, were also key barriers to the effective implementation of projects. For example, the inflation rate in Haiti was mentioned as a significant factor impacting the ability to carry out project activities to reduce water use conflicts in the Artibonito river watershed, and also mentioned in the evaluation of a project to promote social cohesion among youth organizations. Similarly, the evaluation of a project to improve the protection of exotic species in vulnerable ecosystems in Cuba reported that the small size of the economy reduced the interest of external suppliers in trading there and affected the ability of the project to import necessary supplies.

External economic sanctions were also found to act as barriers to the success of projects, in particular the economic sanctions imposed on Cuba. These affected the implementation of multiple projects in the country, limiting opportunities to receive external funds for project implementation. For example, evaluations reported difficulties were experienced in accessing antiretroviral drugs for an HIV project, and delays in procurement for a number of agricultural projects and a project to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable groups affected by a drought in Santiago [19]. Embargos imposed by Haiti on some Dominican exports were also identified as a threat to the success of projects [21].

UNDP was highly valued for adapting to changing circumstances, effective adaptive management and its ability to repurpose project design and resources when faced with unanticipated challenges.⁴ This ability of UNDP to respond to exogenous conditions in the Caribbean was identified as an important factor in implementation success [8, 10]. Evaluations identified three main types of adaptive actions that affected implementation: repurposing (project design and resources); backstopping, (especially procurement); and transitioning (implementation modality).

Several evaluations noted that UNDP repurposed projects and programmes to cope with challenging, external conditions. For example, in October 2016, Hurricane Matthew severely affected Haiti, killing hundreds of people, destroying crops and homes, and forcing more than 60,000 people into temporary shelters. UNDP sustained implementation by reorienting the Ecosystem Based Adaptation project, which was being delivered at three sites across the country, to address the geographical areas most in need [22]. Similarly, despite delays in project implementation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP demonstrated notable flexibility in repurposing funds from the Suriname Country Programme to respond to the country's need for personal protective equipment and supplies [8].

UNDP consistently applied backstopping measures to reduce the potential negative impacts of in-country procurement challenges. The use of specific procurement backstopping measures varied depending on the situation and the particular issue faced, whether the type of service required, the amount of funds involved, or the potential service providers [23]. Backstopping measures were also applied to meet personnel needs. For example, when the manager of a public sector energy efficiency project in Jamaica resigned shortly after

⁴ The specific adaptive strategies discussed above were mentioned in evaluations of projects or programmes undertaken in Barbados, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, St Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. These findings are applicable across the region.



the project inception, the UNDP MCO promoted a project officer to cover the post, and made the Regional Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean (RHLAC) Regional Technical Advisor available for advisory and technical backstopping [24].

Two key factors determined the potential for adaptive actions to positively affect implementation. The first factor was adherence to the initiative's monitoring arrangements. Evaluations highlighted cases where monitoring mechanisms were inadequately followed, including the failure to conduct planned midterm evaluations. This limited opportunities to implement adaptive measures. A second, related issue was timing. Corrective actions taken earlier in the implementation process were more likely to yield positive outcomes. Some evaluation reports highlighted instances where adaptive measures were initiated late in the project cycle, reducing their effectiveness [10, 14, 18, 21, 25, 26, 27].

National ownership

UNDP strongly promoted the political ownership of, and domestic commitment to, its projects [3, 19]. In Cuba, UNDP facilitated ownership through the use of NIM, implementing interventions with a wide array of national counterparts and institutions, thus facilitating the establishment of partnerships with provincial and municipal governments and longstanding and durable relationships with actors in multiple sectors [19]. Moreover, national and local partners recognize the added value of UNDP as a facilitator of intersectoral and multi-level approaches, which contribute to engendering political will and strong national ownership of results. The evaluation of a regional project to foster democratic institutions reported that UNDP had facilitated the involvement and support of senior government managers, including the President of the Dominican Republic [9]. The aim of the project was to develop capacity-building tools, and the perceived usefulness of the tools and the demonstration of political will were mutually reinforcing. Conversely, insufficient national ownership posed a significant barrier to project success. An evaluation of a multi-country initiative aimed at revitalizing tourism post-COVID-19 illustrated this issue. While UNDP sought government participation in grant dissemination and distribution to MSMEs, the evaluation found that the remainder of the project was largely managed without government involvement [28].

Transitioning from NIM to DIM, with country office support, was another adaptive action reported to influence the pace and success of implementation, although less frequently used. The evaluation of one project where UNDP used this strategy to overcome constraints reported that this allowed UNDP to lead on procurement functions, which worked more efficiently and effectively [29]. Another evaluation noted the potential benefits of this type of transition, recommended that UNDP full support should be considered in cases such as this project, where the implementing partner's capabilities were considered weak, based on progress against the workplan [30].

LESSON 5

Essential factors for multi-country projects and initiatives.

Multi-country projects and initiatives demand meticulous planning, good internet access and communication equipment and careful estimation of human and financial resources. Experienced technical staff tend to lessen the need to hire external consultants. Moreover, securing government co-financing demonstrates commitment and shared responsibility, facilitating successful and sustainable implementation of capacity development initiatives.



Human resources

The availability of human resources, including staff numbers, capacities and turnover, are key variables influencing successful project implementation [3, 13]. The evaluation of a multi-country project to promote knowledge sharing on disaster risk reduction between seven countries in the region noted that it was difficult to find potential suppliers or external consultants with the right training to conduct specific activities, which ended up delaying the project. Similarly, the evaluation of a project for the reintegration of involuntary migrants in Jamaica reported that there were procurement challenges and that these were a major contributor to project delays, as were the poor responses to advertisements for hiring consultants. It noted that this was not always related to funding, but rather to the inefficient planning of human resources within the country government and partners at a given time.

The frequent rotation of government technical personnel was often reported as a barrier, causing delays to implementation [3, 4]. Staff turnover was mentioned in particular as a result of changes in government, and UNDP restructuring initiatives. The evaluation of a project to strengthen the operational and financial sustainability of the national protected area system in Jamaica reported that, during the implementation period, there were three different project managers as well as a period where there was no project manager. This hindered the continuity of implementation. Similarly, the evaluation of the regional JCCCP project reported that high staff turnover affected the pace of implementation, as new arriving staff needed to be trained and oriented, which ended up delaying projects [31].

Evaluations identified gaps in specific skills and expertise of country office staff as a factor impacting project implementation, particularly in areas requiring specialized training and experience [3, 4, 13]. An evaluation of the Suriname UNDAF (2012-2016) reported that the lack of staff capacity sometimes resulted in delays in project implementation as additional time was needed to plan for training. The evaluation of a juvenile court project in Trinidad and Tobago reported that having experienced staff for project implementation also meant that the project did not need to hire external consultants, potentially reducing the cost of the project. An evaluation of the Dominican Republic country programme (2014-2017) highlighted a key challenge for the country in the implementation of a law for consolidating public servant careers, which meant that government institutions lacked sufficient capacity to implement projects in the programme.

Technological resources

Lack of access to technology was also seen as a key cause of implementation problems. For example, the evaluation of the Cuba country programme (2018-2021) reported that lack of access to the internet in certain areas limited the implementation of multiple projects within the country [19, 32]. Similarly, the evaluation of the multi-country JCCCP project reported that the unavailability of the necessary equipment created challenges for the procurement processes needed to implement the project in the different countries [31]. The evaluation of the Suriname country programme (2017-2021) highlighted the value of UNDP provision of technological support and equipment to implementing partners, in the form of ICT support and guidance to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Housing to design a system for social housing records.

Financial resources

Evidence shows that some projects did not have realistic budgets to execute their activities, or had unrealistically budgeted for their plans [3]. An evaluation of the Suriname country programme suggested that limited funding created the observed disconnect between the intended logic and actual delivery of the democratic governance and social development component of the programme [8]. Similarly, In Haiti, resource limitations were described as a 'constraining and continuous phenomenon', which affected the



capacity of the country office [33]. An evaluation of the Jamaica country programme (2018-2021) explained the lack of a comprehensive programmatic approach in the area of social protection and poverty as due to financing limitations [34]. Resource constraints were, to some extent, correlated with the income status of countries in the region. For instance, in Belize, the country programme faced ongoing resource limitations. Multiple contextual factors contributed to this challenge, notably the country's classification as an upper middle-income nation, which affected its ability to attract donor funding [35]. This is a common phenomenon in countries who are graduating or have graduated their income status.

Adequate and guaranteed lines of project funding were, for obvious reasons, reported as a key enabler of effective implementation, and more often come from external funding. The evaluation of the Cuba country programme reported that adequate financial support from the Global Fund contributed to the success of the HIV/AIDS strategy project [10]. Similarly, the evaluation of the juvenile court project in Trinidad and Tobago reported that the funding provided by USAID and the judiciary power allowed for proper planning to support key activities [36]. Furthermore, financial resources provided by UNDP have reportedly also served as a catalyst for mobilizing additional resources [11].

Conversely, the lack of government participation in project funding or the inefficient or untimely provision of resources can be a barrier to effective implementation [3, 8]. The evaluation of the juvenile justice project in Trinidad and Tobago reported that government funding of the judicial court system was provided in the context of a constrained fiscal space, resulting in the slow disbursement of funds from the Government, significantly delaying project implementation.

However, several evaluations considered that the participation of the government in project funding a facilitator in project success [34]. The evaluation of a project to reintegrate and rehabilitate involuntarily returned migrants in Jamaica reported that strong government commitment was demonstrated through leadership and the provision of co-financing (which was not mandatory in the project design). Similarly, the evaluation of a project to strengthen the protected areas system in Belize reported that government co-financing exceeded the committed amount, and that the additional contributions facilitated the implementation of the project.

LESSON 6

UNDP comparative advantages in the Caribbean.

UNDP achieves better results when leveraging its convening power, global expertise and regional knowledge, technical and operational capacity, and experience in the region as a trusted partner.

Technical expertise and knowledge broker

Evaluations of NIM projects and projects in which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were implementing partners more commonly mentioned UNDP knowledge and experience as a key comparative advantage and facilitator of implementation. In particular, UNDP built up a wealth of knowledge and experience in biodiversity, natural resource management and climate change, due to a large portfolio of GEF-financed projects [5, 35, 37]. This enabled the agency to provide strong support for implementation of projects under the environment portfolio. The success of UNDP as implementation agency for the protected areas system project in Belize was attributed to its experience in facilitating similar types of interventions [5].



UNDP technical expertise in human and economic development, information management, and its policy advisory services, were highlighted as a key strength in evaluations [10, 18, 37]. Emphasizing these areas enhanced the agency's profile and credibility as a trusted development partner. The country office in Trinidad and Tobago launched a policy dialogue initiative that tackled critical national and regional issues, such as citizen security and Caribbean integration. UNDP support for these dialogues underscored the agency's valuable contribution.

Evaluations frequently mentioned that UNDP had access to a global pool of expertise and was able to mobilize them when needed, especially when the technical capacity was not available in-country [10, 20, 31, 33, 34]. For example, UNDP experts played an important role in work on GIS in Guyana, and policy analysis, development statistics, information systems and knowledge management in other countries [20, 34]. The capacity of UNDP to leverage regional and international expertise distinguished it from other agencies and was highlighted in evaluations as a significant added value.

Evaluations often credited UNDP country offices and MCOs for having significant 'convening power'. This ability to maintain direct engagement with government institutions and other stakeholders earned UNDP a position of trust. Stakeholders thus viewed the agency as an 'honest broker', with the ability to secure the buy-in of decision-makers at the highest level and across political divides. In Haiti, the position of trust UNDP had with the Government and other actors allowed the agency to work in an extremely difficult political environment [16, 26, 33, 35]. In relation to the comparative advantage of UNDP, evaluations report that successful capacity-building strategies were underpinned by [15]:

1. the ability of UNDP to be a neutral facilitator that convenes stakeholders around capacity development issues;
2. the ability of UNDP to inject resources at specific milestones that dovetail with capacity development efforts of different stakeholders;
3. The provision of insights and dissemination of best practices, and
4. the role of UNDP as an incubator for experiments and pilots to derisk ideas.

The UNDP regional capacity and ability to work at regional level was also reported to be instrumental in project success [10, 18, 28, 31, 38]. Several evaluations noted that UNDP was better placed than other development partners to be the implementing agent in multi-country projects. RHLAC demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of development trends, capacities and contexts across the region, and was able to identify priorities and targeted interventions for specific countries [33]. This was advantageous when UNDP was leading multi-country projects.

Operational capacity

The comparative advantage of UNDP in human resource development and institutional strengthening was acknowledged in the design of a national protected areas project for Jamaica [10]. In procurement, UNDP leveraged its supplier agreements to achieve efficiencies. For instance, utilizing the Copenhagen Procurement Services Unit, which specializes in electoral commodities, significantly reduced procurement time and costs in Haiti [16].



LESSON 7

The perceived relevance of UNDP in the Caribbean.

Stakeholder perceptions of the relevance of UNDP capacity-development activities in the Caribbean were influenced by the visibility of UNDP and its implementing partners, the strength of their advocacy, and the clear strategic coherence of their programmes.

Advocacy

UNDP was credited with playing a crucial advocacy role that facilitated the success of various projects [5, 34, 36]. For instance, MCO advocacy for the juvenile court project in Trinidad and Tobago ensured the project's continuity despite economic challenges. UNDP back-office advocacy support to the Project Implementation Unit for a biodiversity project in Guyana's gold mining sector helped elevate the country's profile regionally and internationally, contributing significantly to the project's success [20]. Similarly, UNDP advocacy efforts were instrumental in securing the development of a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Roadmap in the Bahamas [34].

Conversely, an evaluation of the Suriname country programme noted that stakeholders perceived UNDP to be absent from the process for developing the new National Development Plan, and its ability to advocate for national SDG discussions to be limited. Similarly, the evaluation of Belize protected areas system project credited UNDP with providing good operational and strategic support but concluded that it would have been beneficial for the agency to also advocate for legal and institutional reforms at a higher political level, for example directly to the Cabinet of Ministers [4, 5, 8].

Visibility

Whereas UNDP was recognized for its information management capabilities, some evaluations noted that the agency did not sufficiently implement parallel strategies to improve its own visibility. The failure to plan and implement strategic communication initiatives with national partners affected UNDP positioning within countries. Therefore, in some instances, UNDP was little known beyond direct project beneficiaries and within the United Nations system, and national stakeholders did not fully appreciate the overall programme offering of UNDP.

Many evaluations reported limited knowledge of the broad mandate of UNDP among government and civil society stakeholders [8]. Poor knowledge and perceptions of UNDP work affected the implementation of projects as additional time was required for implementers to explain the project and the organization funding or implementing it, which impacted political commitment [33, 39].

UNDP effectively achieved results through strategic communication in several cases. For example, a resilience project in Cuba implemented a Visibility and Communication Plan that enhanced the profile of key collaborators and increased ownership of the process and outcomes. Public events further raised awareness of the project and its oversight mechanisms. Additionally, the project developed an identity manual that established UNDP standards, strategically mapped out communication efforts, and expanded the project's reach [40].

LESSON 8

Flexibility for responsiveness in operations.

Existing provisions for flexible financing policies can be effective to enable fast-track implementation, particularly in crisis-response situations.

The UNDP Engagement Facility Policy provided a rapid and flexible mechanism for crisis response,⁵ enabling country offices to adapt swiftly and facilitate project implementation. This policy was particularly instrumental in accelerating the COVID-19 response. Additionally, the Rapid Financing Facility was employed to fast-track projects in the tourism sector, which were severely affected by the pandemic [29].

Several evaluations pointed out that procurement procedures were considered complex, especially when they were not synchronized with those of national governments, and this posed challenges for implementing partners [10, 11, 19, 31, 33, 36, 41]. Challenges with UNDP procurement policies were more frequently reported in evaluations of NIM projects, and projects in which NGOs were implementing partners. In some cases, UNDP was able to build a strong link between programming and procurement. For example, in Barbados, the procurement team attended programme and operation meetings, creating better understanding of the needs of the programme, meaning that they were able to facilitate revisions of business flows and provide training. The procurement team also helped to sensitize UNDP and other United Nations agencies on its internal capacity, which helped to manage expectations. In areas where it lacked capacity, the procurement team was able to reach out to UNDP headquarters and RBLAC for back-up.

Projects that were executed with resources from the government and managed through UNDP procedures created the need for double accounting by implementing partners. Added to this, the procurement procedures of national governments were not synchronized with United Nations processes. The UNDP Enterprise Resource Planning system (formerly ATLAS) was reported to be problematic either because project teams were insufficiently trained, or because they lacked the appropriate type of contracts to access the system. Furthermore, although country offices were required to use the same procurement guidelines, differences in internal management across offices sometimes resulted in varied interpretations of the guidelines. This occurred, for example, with a multi-country early warning system project implemented in six countries in the region [42]. Despite the same procurement guidelines being used, differences in interpretation by country offices resulted in payment delays at some project sites.

At the country programme level, a lack of harmonization of implementation and reporting rules between UNDP and other United Nations entities was considered by some evaluations to limit the synergistic development of capacity development initiatives [42]. Stakeholders noted that some interventions (e.g., youth projects) could benefit from joint programming across United Nations agencies, but that without a joint funding strategy, agencies were reluctant to pool funding for joint programmes [13].

⁵ UNDP Engagement Facility. <https://popp.undp.org/document/engagement-facility>

LESSON 9

Multi-country projects and initiatives enable harmonized approaches to regional issues through.

Multi-country projects and initiatives can provide opportunities for harmonized approaches to address regional issues and facilitate cross-country learning, contributing to South-South cooperation. However, this requires language barriers to be overcome, and initiatives to be sufficiently tailored to country needs.

Evaluations of multi-country projects and initiatives most frequently considered the use by UNDP of South-South cooperation within the region a positive factor, contributing to project success. In 2018, UNDP supported a joint Haitian-Dominican mission to study strategies to improve services to border populations of both countries [39]. UNDP Cuba organized the entire South-South cooperation process, including methodology, training programmes, materials, and technical assistance, for the initiative and this was described as one of the biggest strengths of the project [33]. An outcome evaluation of the Trinidad and Tobago country programme also identified South-South cooperation with Chile as one of the key achievements of the programme [43].

Language barriers emerged as a key factor that limited the effectiveness of knowledge transfer efforts. In initiatives spanning multiple Caribbean nations, such as the early warning systems project, beneficiaries encountered difficulties due to language disparities and this impeded effective participation and understanding [42]. For example, in a project to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in Suriname, language was a factor limiting the participation of diverse stakeholders in the project [30].

Finally, insufficient tailoring of material to the specific context of recipient countries, including uneven targeting of beneficiaries, was an additional challenge affecting the quality of knowledge transfer initiatives. During the multi-country early warning system project, for example, stakeholders from some countries mentioned that training material appeared to be based on the Cuban context, and not adapted to their national reality, referencing concepts which were unfamiliar in other countries. The project struggled to identify and include representatives of key populations (such as women, older people, or people with disabilities) across the participating countries [42].

LESSON 10

Multi-Country Offices

When the option of in-country presence is not possible, an MCO can be an effective alternative to provide support. For effectiveness, MCOs require in-depth knowledge about the issues of the countries they are assisting, good communication systems, clarity of roles *vis-à-vis* RHLAC, and good ownership of projects.

Few evaluation reports carried out in-depth explorations into the extent to which a multi-country office effectively provided support to countries and it is a clear evidence gap that should be addressed by future evaluations.⁶

⁶ Four evaluations were from the Barbados multi-country office, one on the Jamaica multi-country office, and one on RBLAC.

Available evidence indicates that an established country office is fundamental for building strong relationships with institutional actors and ensuring effective project oversight [18, 19, 20]. Furthermore, there is also evidence of strong understanding and support for initiatives managed under the remit of an MCO.

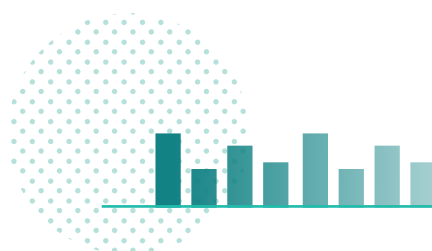
MCOs played a major role in providing implementation support for response and recovery efforts [6, 34]. They also provided relevant financial support to assist MSMEs to implement business improvement plans to overcome the COVID-19 crisis [28]. Further, the Barbados MCO in particular was reported to play an active role in headquarter-led discussions on Small Island Developing States, facilitating South-South cooperation with Central American countries and supporting resource mobilization and sharing of project resources for the implementation of activities [33]. MCOs, in collaboration with RHLAC also facilitated implementation, providing subject matter experts, managerial guidance and quality assurance.

The evidence also indicates that, despite their official MCO status, engagement with countries beyond emergency recovery projects was limited [6, 34]. This has led to several issues, including challenges in engaging with governments and decision-making during project formulation. It also caused delays in project implementation, such as in the development and acceptance of recovery plans. Furthermore, there was a lack of understanding of projects, resulting in limited buy-in and ownership. The high-income status of most countries under the purview of an MCO, along with financial and human resource limitations, were cited as key factors hindering broader engagement.

Despite the clear potential of MCOs to fill a need when an in-country presence is not possible, the evidence indicates that MCOs have often faced challenges related to staffing and administrative issues which may impeded effective project implementation. To address these challenges, UNDP has tried to enhance monitoring functions and leverage existing national capacity. Moreover, there were issues with strategic management and oversight, especially concerning politically sensitive situations. The current structure of MCOs has not always adequately met operational and technical needs and, while regional support exists, it may not be sufficient to address capacity challenges. This could slow down implementation capacity and jeopardize future project implementation.

Gender mainstreaming within MCOs appears insufficient, despite the presence of gender strategies. The absence of gender specialists and the tendency for siloed projects hinder the adoption of best practices, although efforts were made in some offices, including Jamaica, to comprehensively integrate gender into programmes.

Finally, evaluations noted the room to improve internal coherence and synergy between MCOs, clarify roles, share services, and address staffing challenges. Despite some thematic synergies between MCOs, at outcome-level this is mainly *ad hoc* and there are opportunities for enhancement. Challenges such as multi-currency transactions and high turnover rates also impact MCO efficiency, calling for efforts to address staffing stability and streamline processes.





ANNEXES

Annex 1. Additional information on the methodology

Eligibility criteria

- This is a qualitative evidence synthesis of UNDP evaluation studies conducted in the Caribbean region. The scope of the synthesis is limited to evaluations of UNDP projects and programmes conducted between 2015 and 2023, in Caribbean countries. A total of 144 evaluation reports were identified by UNDP for inclusion. Decentralized evaluations deemed unsatisfactory (n=4) or with a moderately unsatisfactory quality rating (n=17), were excluded, as well as multi-country evaluations including countries outside the Caribbean, and in which the findings could not be split between Caribbean and non-Caribbean countries (n=9), leaving a total of 114 evaluations.

Sampling strategy

- We took a sample of the eligible papers for in-depth analysis assuming that they would reach saturation. The sample was based on the existing characteristics of the evaluations. Table A1 describes the four alternatives. This evidence synthesis used Alternative 4 for sampling papers.

TABLE A1. Alternative strategies to sample evaluations based on the variables in which data are available.

Alternative	Variable used to sample	Rationale	Number of papers excluded (to be extracted)
1	Type of evaluation, country, and quality rating	For project evaluations only (all non-project evaluations will be included in the sample), taking the highest quality evaluation per country.	36 (79)
2	GEF evaluations, country, and quality rating	For GEF evaluations (all non-GEF evaluations will be included), taking the highest quality evaluation per country.	13 (102)
3	Combined approach	Applying alternatives 1 and 2*	32 (83)
4	Removing unknown quality evaluations	From alternative 3, including only evaluations with known quality rating	29 (51)

*Alternatives 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive. Hence, the number of papers excluded combining both are not the subtraction of the papers excluded in each alternative.



Conceptual framework

- An adaptation of the CFIR^{55,56} was used to guide assessment of factors that may influence implementation of capacity development activities. Our adaptation uses the same five domains, contextualized for this synthesis.
- The intervention domain is the internal and external capacity development activities in the 25 Caribbean countries under the UNDP RBLAC. The inner setting domain refers to the Country offices and MCOs, while the outer setting domain represents the national (the place where capacity development is being implemented) and international environment. The role and characteristics of different individuals and institutions involved in capacity development is referred to as the actors domain (in contrast to the 'individuals' domains used in CFIR). Finally, the implementation process is the activities and strategies used by country offices, MCOs to support execution. Table A2 identifies the relevant constructs, under each domain, included in the synthesis for investigation.

TABLE A2. Domains and constructs of the modified CFIR framework

Domain	Construct
1. Intervention	Design (e.g., multisectoral; community-based) Complexity
2. Outer setting	Country conditions (macro level factors e.g., economic, political; critical incidents etc.) National capacities (financial; physical infrastructure; information technology etc.) Policies, procedures, rules, laws
3. Inner setting	Knowledge and experience (comparative advantage) Communication / information sharing practices Strategic positioning
4. Actors (role played)	Leaders Implementation facilitators (subject matter experts who assist, coach or support implementation) Implementation leads Implementation supports Other roles
5. Implementation process	Assessing needs Assessing context Tailoring (choosing and operationalizing strategies) Reflection and evaluation

Source: Adapted from ⁵⁶.



Data extraction and coding

- Data from the selected evaluations was extracted in EPPI-Reviewer Web. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used. We assigned codes to the themes and concepts appearing in evaluation reports, according to the domain (parent code) and construct (child code) in the conceptual framework. However, to respond to the nuances in the data, we also introduced new codes or constructs under each domain, where appropriate.
- Twenty percent of the evaluations were coded independently, by the two reviewers. Disagreements were resolved by discussion. Data extraction was then done by a single reviewer for the remaining papers included in the synthesis and for the evaluations that were only available in Spanish and French.
- For synthesis question (SQ) 1, we extracted data for the intervention, inner setting, outer setting, and implementation process domains (domains 1 – 3; and 5). For SQ 2 we extracted data for the actors domain.



Annex 2. Data extraction fields categorized in groups

TABLE A3. Data extraction fields categorized in groups

Group	Data extraction field
Bibliographic characteristics	Title Year URL Language English Spanish French
Characteristics of project	Project ID Corporate strategic solutions Poverty Governance Resilience Sustainable planet Energy Gender equality Country(ies) covered in the evaluation report Implementation modality DIM NIM NGO/CSO UN Agency UNDP (Country Office) support to NIM Non-UN Implementing partners (name) / Execution agency (for GEF projects) Responsible partner Donor Other partners

◀ Table A3 (cont'd)

Group	Data extraction field
Characteristics of evaluation	Type of evaluation Country Programme UNDAF - Programme Project Outcome Evaluation status Mid-term Terminal Not applicable Evaluation quality Highly satisfactory Satisfactory Moderately satisfactory NA Evaluation period <hr/> Country programme evaluation criteria Relevance Coherence Effectiveness Efficiency Sustainability
Implementation challenges (SQ 1)	Domains 1, 2, 3, and 5 (see Table 2) Relevant construct (see Table 2) Other code (s)
MCO support to constituent countries (SQ 2)	Domain 4 (see Table 2) Relevant construct (see Table 2) Other code (s)
Partnership and portfolio diversification (SQ 3)	Description of partnership Domain 4 (see Table 2) Relevant construct (see Table 2) Other code (s)



Annex 3. Characteristics of included evaluations

		N	%
Corporate strategic solutions			
Poverty		10	19%
Governance		6	11%
Resilience		0	0%
Sustainable planet		11	20%
Energy		4	7%
Gender equality		1	2%
Other		33	61%
Office			
Multi-country offices	Barbados	9	18%
	Jamaica	6	12%
	Trinidad and Tobago	4	8%
Country offices	Belize	3	6%
	Cuba	5	10%
	DR	6	12%
	Guyana	1	2%
	Haiti	7	14%
	Suriname	4	8%
Not applicable	RBLAC	5	10%
Countries covered in the evaluation			
Anguilla		2	4%
Antigua and Barbuda		4	7%
Bahamas		1	2%
Barbados		5	9%
Belize		6	11%
Cuba		6	11%
Dominica		7	13%
DR		9	17%
Grenada		5	9%
Guyana		5	9%
Haiti		8	15%
Jamaica		10	19%
Montserrat		2	4%
Saint Lucia		7	13%
SKN		2	4%
Suriname		7	13%
SVG		5	9%



	N	%
Countries covered in the evaluation		
Trinidad and Tobago	5	9%
Turks and Caicos	1	2%
Virgin Islands	3	6%
Implementation modality		
DIM	13	26%
NIM	13	26%
Not reported	24	48%
Implementing partner		
Academic institutions	5	9%
CSO/NGO	14	26%
Government entities	13	24%
International organizations	4	7%
Private sector	1	2%
UN agencies	2	4%
UN Country office	0	0%
UNDP	1	2%
Other	10	19%
Type of evaluation		
Country programme	8	16%
UNDAF Programme	4	8%
Project	31	61%
Outcome	3	6%
Other	5	10%
Evaluation status		
Mid-term	8	16%
Final	32	63%
Not applicable	8	16%
Not reported	3	6%
Evaluation quality		
Highly satisfactory	1	2%
Moderately satisfactory	9	18%
Satisfactory	26	51%
Not available	15	29%
Language		
English	39	76%
Spanish	9	18%
French	3	6%



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