Regional RBAP Evaluation Synthesis on Climate Action

Inception Report

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1. Background

As part of its Strategy 2021-2025, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is committed to developing knowledge products designed to improve policymaking and programme management decisions. Based on growing demand from the UNDP Executive Board and management for concise and aggregated evaluation evidence, the IEO has continued diversifying its offer to include evaluation synthesis of existing evaluative knowledge from thematic evaluations, Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPE), decentralized evaluations, and other assessments.

Evaluation synthesis can be broadly defined as the aggregation and analysis of evidence-based knowledge from evidence-based documents such as evaluations. Information is synthesized around a topic to increase the applicability of those findings and develop new knowledge through integration. This synthesis is framed around the Regional Bureau's work on climate action. It will contribute towards the scaling up of support in the region for climate action through UNDP's Climate Promise plan of action.

Under UNDP's Climate Promise Initiative, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP) supports countries in the region to prepare and meet their climate commitments made through the Paris Agreement. UNDP is supporting 27 countries in the region to prepare or update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), the majority (74 percent) of which have submitted updated or new NDCs to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, signalling intentions to enhance their climate mitigation or adaptation ambitions.[1]

Related to NDC development, UNDP also supports countries to strengthen the enabling environment for directing development financing and private sector investment support finance for mitigation and adaptation efforts. Major channels include the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund, and the World Bank.

Underpinning UNDP's support on climate action is the principle of Leaving No One Behind, recognizing that climate change most affects women, the poor and those living in environmentally precarious locations, and that the transition to green economies may have serious implications for those whose jobs and livelihoods depend on polluting sectors.[2,3]

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[1] *Regional snapshot: Asia and the Pacific* (no date). https://climatepromise.undp.org/research-and-reports/regional-snapshot-asia-and-pacific#:~:text=The%20Asia%2DPacific%20region%20covers,nine%20are%20considered%20fragile%20states.

[2] *UNDP's climate promise in action in Asia and the Pacific | United Nations Development Programme* (no date). https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/news/undps-climate-promise-action-asia-and-pacific#:~:text=In%20Asia%2DPacific%2C%20UNDP's%20Climate,environmental%20sustainability%20through%20NDC%20enhancement.

[3] *Helping countries reach their climate goals* (no date). https://climatepromise.undp.org/.

2. Purpose, thematic area of focus, and key synthesis questions

2.1 Purpose and Approach

The overall purpose of this regional evaluation synthesis is to strengthen learning within UNDP and to support evidence-based decision-making and delivery of programme results on climate action in Asia and the Pacific. The results of this synthesis are expected to promote programmatic learning based on UNDP evidence-based knowledge of its past performance. (RBAP Regional Synthesis on Climate Action Approach Paper, August 2023).

Considerations for the conduct of rapid qualitative synthesis reviews will be factored into the overall approach. This includes setting tight parameters for the inclusion of evaluation studies, limiting and focusing the key review questions, narrowing the thematic area of focus, and minimizing the number of data items required in the coding framework.

2.2 Climate Action thematic focus

"Climate action" is an inherently broad and highly complex thematic area. To maximize the usefulness of findings for the Asia Pacific region, the synthesis team sought to narrow the thematic scope to allow for more targeted and in-depth learnings as well as focusing the synthesis on sectors and areas most relevant for current and future RBAP programming.

To identify thematic sub-focus areas the synthesis team reviewed UNDP Climate Promise documents and regional assessments, cross-referenced key technical work areas with SDG 13 targets, consulted with subject-matter experts, and reviewed the scoping results of the initial IEO evaluation search.

Five areas of focus will be covered under the broader thematic categories of climate change adaptation, climate change mitigation and disaster risk reduction. Table one below provides the rationale for the selected areas along with the alignment to Climate Promise Technical Work Areas and SDG 13 targets. Inclusion, as defined in Climate Promise Technical Work Areas 7 - "effective inclusion of youth, women, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable communities" - will be considered a cross-cutting area of focus.

It is expected that some evaluation reports may cover more than one area of focus (e.g., an Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) project that has both mitigation and adaptation objectives; a Disaster Risk Reduction project that is integrated with coastal adaptation). Additionally, certain Climate Promise Technical Work areas are expected to emerge as supporting elements (e.g., an AFOLU mitigation project that includes support for accessing finance; an energy mitigation project that feeds into a strategy for net-zero pathways).

Table One: Climate Action Areas of Focus

Climate Action Area		Sector/ Sub-Area	Rationale	Climate Promise Technical Work Area	SDG 13 Target
Inclusion	Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience	Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU)	• Support to AFOLU in the region is expected to increase in the 2nd phase of Climate Promise • Increased priority of adaptation actions (87% of countries have enhanced adaptation measures in revised NDCs)	**Main areas:** - Adaptation and resilience - Forests, land and nature **Secondary areas:** - Climate Finance - Loss and Damage	13.2 – Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning 13.3 – Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning 13.4 – mobilizing $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries 13.5 – promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in LDCs and SIDS
		Coastal Areas Adaptation	• High vulnerability for SIDS and low-lying coastal areas • Adapting to rising seas is a key challenge		
	Climate Change Mitigation	Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU)	• Support to AFOLU in the region is expected to increase in the 2nd phase of Climate Promise • Asia has the highest share of global AFOLU emissions	**Main areas:** - Forests, land and nature - Energy **Secondary areas:** - Climate Finance - Transparency - Net zero pathways	
		Energy	• Priority issue for high-emitting countries and major economies in the region • Emerging area – net zero ambition		
	Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)		• Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world • Inclusion of DRR theme allows for full coverage of all SDG 13 targets	**Main area:** - Adaptation and resilience **Secondary area:** - Loss and Damage	13.1 – strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters

2.3 Conceptual Framework and Key Synthesis Review Questions

The synthesis team conducted a familiarization review of a sample of 15 evaluation reports to help determine the most appropriate conceptual framework and to assess the feasibility of responding to the initial synthesis review questions with available data and evidence.

The sample covered different evaluation types and country categories. In terms of evaluation quality, only those reports that received a quality assessment rating of moderately satisfactory or satisfactory were included in the review. There were no available evaluation reports with a quality assessment rating of highly satisfactory.

Observations include:

- Many of the final/terminal evaluations have a strong formative focus (design and implementation issues, prospects for sustainability and impact, learnings for future phases).
- There is a lack of longitudinal and in-depth qualitative data (particularly for GEF project evaluation reports).
- There is little causal evidence on intervention effects or rigorous contribution analysis of UNDP's programming initiatives have contributed to progress towards climate action targets and goals. This limits feasibility of answering "what works" type of questions (initial synthesis question 1).
- Evaluation reports contain data and descriptive analysis that can respond to questions on "why" and "how" an intervention works or not (initial synthesis question 3). In most cases evaluations include analysis of the context, design and implementation factors that contribute to effectiveness.
- There is little data and evidence on leave no one behind (LNOB) issues. Evaluation focus is largely focused on gender issues related to participation or inclusion with little to no analysis of the other vulnerable groups – youth, indigenous peoples, marginalized communities. (initial synthesis question 4).
- Independent country program evaluations (ICPE) have comparatively more data on country context and challenges, coherence, and strategic positioning of UNDP.

Considering the type of available evaluation data and evidence, the conceptual framework will be grounded in a thematic synthesis approach[4]. This approach will be data-driven and will allow for the inductive construction of key analytical themes to better understand why or how climate action interventions work or not across identified areas of focus and country contexts. Key

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[4] The thematic synthesis approach will be guided by: Thomas, J., and Harden, A. (2008) Methods for the Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Research in Systematic Reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8(45) and Snilstveit, B., Oliver, S. and Vojtkova, M. (2012) Narrative Approaches to systematic review and synthesis of evidence for international development policy and processes. *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 4(3).

synthesis review questions will provide the structure to identify, analyse and report on the data patterns emerging from evaluation findings, conclusions, and lessons.

Key synthesis questions

1. What were the main **design** factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions and the achievement of results?
   a) What were the main design **barriers**? What were the main barriers for the effective **inclusion** of youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities?
   b) What were the main design **facilitators**? What were the main barriers for the effective inclusion of youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities?

2. What were the main **implementation** factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions and the achievement of results?
   a) What were the main implementation **barriers**? What were the main barriers for the effective **inclusion** of youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities?
   b) What were the main implementation **facilitators**? What were the main facilitators for the effective **inclusion** of youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities?

3. What were the main **context** factors influencing the effectiveness or interventions and the achievement of results?
   a) What were the main internal and external contextual **barriers**? What were the main barriers for the effective **inclusion** of youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities?
   b) What were the main internal and external contextual **facilitators**? What were the main facilitators for the effective **inclusion** of youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities?

3. Methodological Approach

3.1 Eligibility Criteria

IEO conducted an initial scoping to identify evaluations relevant to climate action themes and topics using UNDP's Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) tool. Search terms included those relevant to the Climate Promise key work areas, RBAP work mentioned in the UNDP intranet and website, the AIDA taxonomy, and keywords gleaned from a quick literature review. The search included all types of centralized and decentralized evaluations completed

between 2014 and 2023 except for mid-term evaluations. The geographic scope included all the countries and territories of RBAP.

The scoping was then iteratively refined through discussions with RBAP to focus specifically on the 'climate' subdomain and to incorporate feedback from RBAP on the scope, research questions and additional search terms. (RBAP Regional Synthesis on Climate Action Approach Paper, August 2023).

To ensure the reliability of the evaluation data and evidence, the synthesis team removed all evaluation reports from the universe of eligible evaluations that had a quality assessment rating of unsatisfactory or moderately unsatisfactory, along with evaluation reports with no quality assessment ratings.

Additionally, all Green Climate Fund (GCF) project mid-term evaluations[5] (n=6) were added to the eligible universe to include all major climate financing mechanisms.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The synthesis team followed Cochrane's[6] guidance on purposive sampling for qualitative evidence synthesis.[7] Steps followed included a familiarization review of eligible reports, mapping of reports against individual countries and thematic areas of focus, screening for data-richness, and piloting the sampling framework.

Three main sampling criteria were applied:

- **Evaluation type** – to include the full diversity of type, focus and scale of evaluation data and evidence.
- **Geographic distribution** – to identify learnings that address key regional climate action priorities and programming according to country types and needs (e.g., differing climate action priorities for SIDS, high-emitters, LDCs).
- **Thematic relevance and data richness** – to identify learnings that are aligned with the identified climate action thematic areas. This will allow for a level of data granularity needed to examine "why" and "how" the identified factors are influencing the effectiveness and achievement of results in different thematic areas.

Table two below presents the selection criteria, strategy and rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of evaluation reports.

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[5] As GCF-funded projects were launched in recent years there are not yet any available final project evaluation reports.
[6] Cochrane is an independent, diverse, global organization that collaborates to produce trusted synthesized evidence, make it accessible to all, and advocate for its use. https://www.cochrane.org/
[7] https://epoc.cochrane.org/sites/epoc.cochrane.org/files/public/uploads/Resources-for-authors2017/qes_guidance_on_sampling.pdf.

Table 2 – Sampling Strategy

Criteria		Selection Strategy	Rationale
Evaluation type	Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPE)	- include all ICPEs	- contain evidence and data on responsiveness to country challenges, programme coherence and strategic positioning of UNDP - all eligible ICPEs include coverage of country-level climate action program priorities - small number of eligible CPEs (n=6)
	UNDAF Evaluations	- exclude all	- interventions and evaluations not UNDP-led
	Outcome Evaluations	- include all thematically relevant outcome evaluations	- contain evidence and data on areas of strength, weakness and gaps, especially in respect to the appropriateness of the UNDP partnership strategy and the obstacles to achievement of outcomes - small number of potential thematically relevant evaluations (n=3)
	~~Mid-term Project Evaluations~~	- ~~include all thematically relevant GCF-funded mid-term project evaluations~~	- to ensure the GCF, as a major climate fund, is included in sample - small number of potential thematically relevant evaluations (n=6)
	Final Project Evaluations	- selection based on geographic distribution and thematic relevance (criteria detailed below)	- overwhelming majority (more than 90%) of eligible reports are project evaluations - contain more granular evidence and data specific to thematic areas of focus
Geographic distribution		2 evaluation reports per country for single country offices (22x2=44) 1 evaluation report per country for multi-country offices - Fiji and Samoa (n=11) 1 multi-country project evaluation for each multi-country office (n=2) 1 regional RBAP evaluation	- coverage of all country classification types (income level – LIC, LMIC, UMIC; SIDS; fragile states/conflict and LDCs) - will allow for context specific analysis of learnings within and across different country types - given the large number of SIDS covered by multi-country offices only one report per country will be selected to not overly weight this category - multi-country evaluations will be included to identify broader regional considerations - target number of selected reports reflects the total needed for a credible sample size

Thematic relevance and data-richness		Select only those evaluations that align with the identified climate action areas of focus: - Climate change adaptation: AFOLU and coastal areas - Climate change mitigation: AFOLU and energy - Disaster risk reduction	- this selection strategy applies primarily to the selection of project evaluations - selection will consider overall distribution of evaluations across the identified thematic areas of focus as well as data richness

Sample selection and size

A sample size of between 50 and 60 reports will be reached through an iterative selection process applying the above criteria. Purposively selected ICPEs, outcome evaluations and GCF mid-term evaluations will be mapped against the countries first. Project evaluations will then be selected to complete thematic and country distribution targets (see Annex 2).

During coding, any selected project evaluation reports that are deemed not sufficiently aligned with the identified thematic areas of focus will be excluded. Similarly, if after completing the coding of the initial sample it is found that evidence and data is lacking within specific areas of focus or country types, additional project evaluations will be selected.

Based on emerging themes identified in the pilot coding, as well as reviews of similar regional evaluation syntheses, it is expected that a range of 50 to 60 evaluation reports will be sufficient to reach data saturation.

3.4 Coding Framework, Data Analysis and Synthesis

Coding process and protocols

The synthesis team will follow Thomas and Harden's (2008) three-stage approach to thematic synthesis of qualitative data[8]. EPPI-Reviewer software will be used to manage the data extraction, coding and analysis[9].

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[8] Thomas, J., and Harden, A. (2008) Methods for the Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Research in Systematic Reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8(45)
[9] Thomas J, Brunton J, Graziosi S (2010) EPPI-Reviewer 4.0: software for research synthesis. EPPI Centre Software. London: Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

Stage one – Inductive line-by-line coding of relevant evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons structured by the key synthesis review questions.

Stage two – Grouping of coded text by descriptive themes around intervention design, implementation and context factors. EPPI-Reviewer will be used to illustrate the link between the inductive codes and the identified descriptive themes.

Stage three – Translating the descriptive themes into higher order analytical themes around design, implementation and context factors. This will allow for the analysis of key factors across evaluation studies, key climate action areas of focus, and differing country contexts.

Coding Framework

A coding framework will be iteratively developed through two rounds of piloting covering 10 evaluation studies. The selected studies reflect different types of evaluation, countries, and climate action areas of focus. Both synthesis team members will code the same five evaluation reports in each round. This will also help to ensure consistency of coding and interpretation.

The initial coding framework (Annex 1) includes the identification of key characteristics of the evaluation study, the intervention (project/programme), the country, and the climate action area of focus. Analytical themes, assigned to each component of the synthesis review questions, were defined in the first pilot round by applying the three coding stages described above. These themes will be iteratively refined through the subsequent pilot round with the aim of reducing the number of higher-level codes and limiting redundancies, while maintaining the flexibility to add new analytical themes if they emerge. Additional questions on the relevant lessons identified in the evaluation studies and considerations for transferability have been included in the framework. The data extracted for these two questions will be considered in the overall analysis and synthesis.

Analysis and Synthesis

The coding of individual studies will be followed by analysis of the newly organized data across all studies. EPPI-Reviewer will be used to explore relationships across design, implementation and context factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions. Cross-analysis will be conducted to identify programmatic learnings specific to different types of countries or climate action areas of focus. For example, key factors influencing how or why climate mitigation initiatives may be different in SIDS than in countries that are major emitters.

The final report will include an overview of the regional context for climate action in the Asia Pacific region, a summary of the review objectives and methodological approach, a descriptive analysis of the selected sample of evaluation studies, and higher-level findings for each synthesis review question and sub-question. Where possible, findings relevant to different climate action

areas of focus and country types will be disaggregated. Attention will be placed on maximizing the usability of programmatic learnings in future RBAP climate action initiatives.

4. Proposed Timeline

Deliverable	Target Submission Date (2023)
Draft Inception Report (to IEO)	26 September
Final Inception Report and Coding Framework	10 October
Evidence Collation and Descriptive Analysis	7 November
Draft Synthesis Report (to IEO)	28 November (note: all comments to be received by 8 December to allow team one week for final revisions)
Presentation of Draft Report to RBAP	13 December
Final Synthesis Report (to IEO)	15 December

Annex 1 – Draft Coding Framework

Note: the coding framework will be iteratively refined as the synthesis team completes the second pilot round of coding.

Evaluation Information	Type of Evaluation
	Project – final/ mid-term
	ICPE
	Outcome
	Thematic
	Other (mention)
	Report Publication Year
	Quality Rating
	Satisfactory
	Moderately Satisfactory

Project/Programme Details	**Project ID**
	Project Duration (in no. of Years)
	Project Launch (Year of Launch)
	Total Project Budget
	Source of Funding (keeping for pilot to decide later)

Country Classification	**Country (Countries) of Implementation**
	Country Classification
	Low-Income Country
	Lower Middle-Income Country (LMIC)
	Upper Middle-Income Country (UMIC)
	Small Island Developing States (SIDS)
	Least Developed Country (LDC)
	Fragile State/ Conflict
	High-Emitters
	Others

Implementation Information	**Implementation Modality**
	National Implementation Modality (NIM)
	Direct Implementation Modality (DIM)
	NGO/CSO Implementation Modality
	UN Agency Implementation
	Not applicable

	Type of Implementation Agency (keeping for pilot, to decide later)
	UN agency
	Government (national, regional, local)
	CSO
	Other
	Implementation Scale
	Local
	Sub-national
	National
	Regional
	Intervention type (TBD - keeping for pilot to decide later)
	Policy and Regulatory interventions
	System Strengthening (demand/supply chain strengthening, financial syndication, etc)
	Capacity Building (individuals, institutions, organisations, decision makers, users, etc)
	Technical Assistance
	Other
Thematic Focus	**Thematic Focus Areas**
	Adaptation and Resilience
	AFOLU
	coastal protection/adaptation
	Mitigation
	AFOLU
	Energy
	DRR
	Others (mention if a theme with substantive content emerges that is not already covered in the themes given above)

SDG 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	
	SDG 13.1 (Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related disasters)
	SDG 13.2 (Integrate climate change measures into policies, strategies, and planning)
	SDG 13.3 (Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning)
	SDG 13.4 (mobilizing resources from all sources to address the needs of developing countries)
	SDG 13.5 (Promote mechanisms to raise capacity for planning and management in LDCs and SIDS)
Climate Promise Technical Work Area	Adaptation & Resilience
	Circular Economy
	Climate Finance
	Climate Security
	Energy
	Forests, Land and Nature
	Inclusion
	Just Transition
	Loss and Damage
	Net Zero Pathways
	Transparency
	Urban Issues
Questions for Qualitative Synthesis	
Intervention Description	
Main Outcomes	
Main Outputs	

Design Factors	
Design Barriers	Planning and preparation
	Scope and focus
	Stakeholder engagement
	Coherence and complementarity
	M&E design
	Barriers for Inclusion
	Other (a major theme as emerges and not covered above already)
Design Facilitators	Planning and preparation
	Scope and focus
	Stakeholder engagement
	Coherence and complementarity
	M&E design
	Facilitators for Inclusion
	Other (a major theme as emerges and not covered above already)
Implementation factors	
Implementation Barriers	Management and governance
	Monitoring and Evaluation
	Stakeholder engagement
	Coherence and complementarity
	Knowledge generation and dissemination
	Technical expertise and capacity building
	Mechanisms
	UNDP comparative advantage
	Sustainability
	replication and scalability
	Barriers for Inclusion
	Other (a major theme as emerges and not covered above already)
	Management and governance

Implementation Facilitators	Monitoring and Evaluation
	Stakeholder engagement
	Coherence and complementarity
	Knowledge generation and dissemination
	Technical expertise and capacity building
	Mechanisms
	UNDP comparative advantage
	Sustainability
	replication and scalability
	Facilitators for Inclusion
	Other (a major theme as emerges and not covered above already)
Context Factors	
Context Barriers	Socio-economic and political context (macro)
	Systemic challenges
	Social norms and institutional cultures
	Political will and priorities
	Barriers for Inclusion
	Other (a major theme as emerges and not covered above already)
Context facilitators	Socio-economic and political context (macro)
	Systemic challenges
	Social norms and institutional cultures
	Political will and priorities
	Facilitators for Inclusion
	Other (a major theme as emerges and not covered above already)
Transferability	What are the main considerations for transferability of learnings? (keeping for pilot to decide later)
Lessons	What are the key lessons identified?