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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION LIBERIA



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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: Liberia

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ACRONYMS

ACDP	Accelerated community development programme
ADR	Alternative dispute resolution
BVR	Biometric Voter Registration
CO	Country office
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSC	County Service Centre
CVE	Civic voter education
EWER	Early warning and early response
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LDSP	Liberia Decentralization Support Project
LESP	Liberia Electoral Support Project
LNOB	Leave no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MSME	Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises
NAP	National Action Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NEC	National Elections Commission
PAPD	Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development
PWD	People with disabilities
ROAR	Results-Oriented Annual Report
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual gender-based violence
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

Evaluation Brief: Liberia

The year 2023 was a pivotal one in Liberia's recent history of peace and democracy, with the first nationally administered presidential and legislative elections since the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2018. At this point, Liberia sustained more than two decades of peace following the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement in August 2003. Peace remains fragile in this West African nation, plagued by institutional weaknesses and socio-economic and health crises. Hence, ensuring credible elections and an orderly transition of power was essential for the next chapter of the country's development.

During this cycle, UNDP Liberia carefully navigated its country programme amid economic stagnation and external shocks that endangered the nation's fragile peace and development. Following 12 years of stabilization and the conclusion of the UNMIL mandate, the first peaceful transition of government in 2018 marked a new chapter for Liberia, embodied in the country's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development, 2018–2023. UNDP played a pivotal role in the creation of this agenda, addressing weak public institutions, corruption, inequalities, and conflict drivers to foster positive and lasting peace.

Declining donor focus coupled with new crises affecting the development trajectory, as well as the high dependence on foreign aid in a context of persistent structural constraints, challenged the government and international partners to meet ambitious goals and targets. Nonetheless, UNDP continued to play a critical role in Liberia, balancing emerging needs, government demands, and advancing key agendas despite contextual and institutional challenges and declining development funding. To safeguard decades of investment, UNDP prioritized efforts to prevent setbacks. Achieving its ambitious goals and ensuring national ownership continued to be challenging in the current context.

UNDP Liberia played a leading role in governance, security, and justice, advancing inclusive and gender-responsive public services and decentralization, with particular focus on the delivery of essential services close to the people. Its electoral support was a standout success and remarkable milestone for the country, reflecting long-standing efforts to strengthen institutions and build trust. Yet in the areas of justice, decentralization, and conflict prevention, challenges in achieving meaningful results, ownership, and capacity persisted. While progress in strengthening the institutional environment was evident, challenges in political will, accountability, and enforcement limited the overall impact. Moving forward, strategically addressing these issues and leveraging alternative approaches in the rule of law space, notably dispute resolution and access to justice, is essential.

UNDP Liberia's strong leadership in advancing the climate change agenda and the allocation of core resources for inclusive growth were key to the implementation of the portfolio. The diverse initiatives involving UN partners, government, and non-state actors – at the national level and delivered on the ground – yielded mixed results. More articulated and evidence-based strategies and approaches are needed to support these initiatives, particularly to help remove structural barriers to job creation, small and medium-sized enterprises, and value chain development and integration.

UNDP's work in the current cycle continued to be largely constrained in terms of sustainability of service, activities, and benefits, including in areas of long-standing support and investments. As Liberia prepares its next national development strategy, UNDP stands at a critical juncture to redefine its strategic role, programmatic offer, and overall positioning for the next programme cycle.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. For the upcoming country programme and in anticipation of Liberia's forthcoming national development strategy, UNDP must pursue a more focused strategy, prioritizing consolidation, building on the portfolio approach, and setting achievable goals. Overly ambitious targets must be avoided, instead refocusing thematically and geographically on priority areas and investment needs. This implies a clear understanding of the office's comparative advantages, and recognition of where contributions will be sustained and scaled up, which may require targeting fewer counties but with deepened and more impactful interventions.

Recommendation 2. The new administration's commitments to accountability and transparency, as well as its vision for Liberia's development through the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development and comprehensive and interconnected development strategies, provide UNDP with an opportunity to consolidate ongoing processes. This requires attention to the transition of roles and responsibility and the conditions for sustainability, while acknowledging resource constraints, operational realities, and the need for better adapted strategies.

Recommendation 3. The broad recognition of the need for locally driven and strengthened articulation of development interventions at the subnational level presents opportunities for UNDP Liberia to leverage its convener and coordination role, including the effective localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on its comparative advantages, the country office should further focus on conflict drivers and the removal of structural barriers in the enabling environments for the inclusive green growth areas of work.

Recommendation 4. The transition to a national implementation modality should be pursued gradually and prioritized where feasible, while revising overall UNDP's partnership approach with governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as within joint UN programming and in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator Office.

Recommendation 5. The country office must continue to drive its value proposition and resource mobilization by strengthening results-based systems, reporting and feedback practices, and communication of results. These efforts imply the need to establish a clear and cohesive narrative of what UNDP has achieved and aims to achieve in Liberia, and to harmonize results and indicator frameworks to effectively measure progress, results, and change.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



1.1 Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to gather and present evidence of the organization’s contributions to national development priorities, as well as the effectiveness of its strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts to achieve sustainable development results. ICPEs are independent evaluations conducted within the framework of the general provisions of the UNDP Evaluation Policy.¹

This was the second independent country evaluation conducted by the IEO in Liberia.² The overall objective of this ICPE was to inform the preparation of UNDP Liberia’s next country programme document (CPD) for 2026–2030. In addition, it aimed to support UNDP’s accountability to its stakeholders, including the Executive Board, the Government of Liberia, donor partners, civil societies, and the community at large, and to contribute to institutional learning and knowledge sharing, particularly at the country and regional levels. The evaluation covered the current programme cycle (2020–2024)³ and all UNDP activities from January 2020 to December 2023, including development projects and non-project activities, regardless of their source of funding (Annex 5).

1.2 Evaluation methodology

This ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process and adhered to United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.⁴ Four main evaluation questions framed the whole exercise. In line with UNDP’s gender mainstreaming strategy and ‘leave no one behind’ principle, the evaluation examined the level of mainstreaming across the country programme and operations, as well as results achieved. The detailed methodology of the ICPE is described in Annex 1 (Terms of Reference).

The evaluation team collected and analysed qualitative data from primary and secondary sources to inform, triangulate, and cross-examine findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Aside from a document review (see Annex 5), the evaluation team conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, online and in-person, with 109 internal and external stakeholders from different sectors and types of engagement with UNDP (68:32 male/female ratio; see details in Annex 7).⁵ Field visits covered intervention sites in eight counties, including hard-to-reach areas: Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Grand Bassa, and Margibi (Annex 4).

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’s performance and, eventually, to the sustainability of results?
-

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

² An Assessment of Development Report undertaken in 2012 covered the period between 2004 and mid-2011, while the following cycles were not independently evaluated. See <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/5970>.

³ As per the formal approval of by the Executive Board. The extension of the country programme until 2025 is under review, given the change of government in January 2024 and the preparation of a new national development strategy for Liberia (replacing the Pro-Poor Agenda for Development, 2018–2023).

⁴ See website of the United Nations Evaluation Group, <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

⁵ UNDP personnel, government representatives, public institutions, and civil servants at the national and subnational level, UN country team representatives, development partners, donors, civil society organizations, private sector, academia, and final beneficiaries.

The evaluation assessed outcome-level results using the capacity development framework⁶ and against the CPD output and outcome indicators (Annex 8), while considering three main circumstances: (1) the transition since the withdrawal of UNMIL; (2) external shocks in light of unprecedented crises (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic; Ukraine war); and (3) the presidential and legislative elections in 2023. The performance of the UNDP country office (CO) was scored for each indicator included in the evaluation matrix using a four-point scale, and is presented in Annex 8. The IEO Gender-Results Effectiveness Scale was used to assess the quality and level of achievements by programme outcome.⁷

The draft ICPE report went through an internal and external quality assurance process, before being submitted to the country office and the Regional Bureau for Africa for review and identification of factual errors, and finally shared with government officials and other national partners for feedback.

1.3 Evaluation limitations

Many projects in the country programme portfolio were in the early stages or in the middle of implementation, in which case the evaluation added a forward-looking element to the analysis. The CO shifted to a portfolio approach mid-cycle, but some of the components remain underfunded and/or not yet implemented. Reference documentation, including monitoring and reporting data, was made available mainly during or after the in-country mission. To determine the actual level of implementation of some interventions, the evaluation team had to rely on interviews and validations with the Programme Management Support Unit. In addition, the timing of the ICPE resulted in constraints for multiple reasons: (1) the high demand on the country office and the limited level of attention from external stakeholders due to the election period;⁸ (2) two project-level evaluations in the governance portfolio were conducted between September and October, leading to some level of 'evaluation fatigue'; (3) the end of the rainy season still affected the road conditions and plans for project site visits; and (4) multiple competing priorities and commitments burdened the overstretched CO team. The evaluation team conducted remote interviews until March 2024 to mitigate these constraints, including the unavailability of national counterparts given the election results and change of government. Despite this flexibility, some public officials were not available to participate in the evaluation exercise.

1.4 Context

The year 2023 was a pivotal one in Liberia's recent history of peace and democracy, with the first nationally administered presidential and legislative elections since the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2018. At this point, Liberia had sustained peace for two decades following the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement in August 2003. Peace remains fragile⁹ in this West African nation plagued by institutional weaknesses and socio-economic and health crises. Hence, ensuring credible elections and an orderly transition of power was a priority for the next chapter of the country's development.

⁶ See https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/CDG_PrimerReport_final_web.pdf.

⁷ Gender-Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) gender outcomes categories: negative, insensitive, targeted, sensitive, and transformative: https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES_English.pdf.

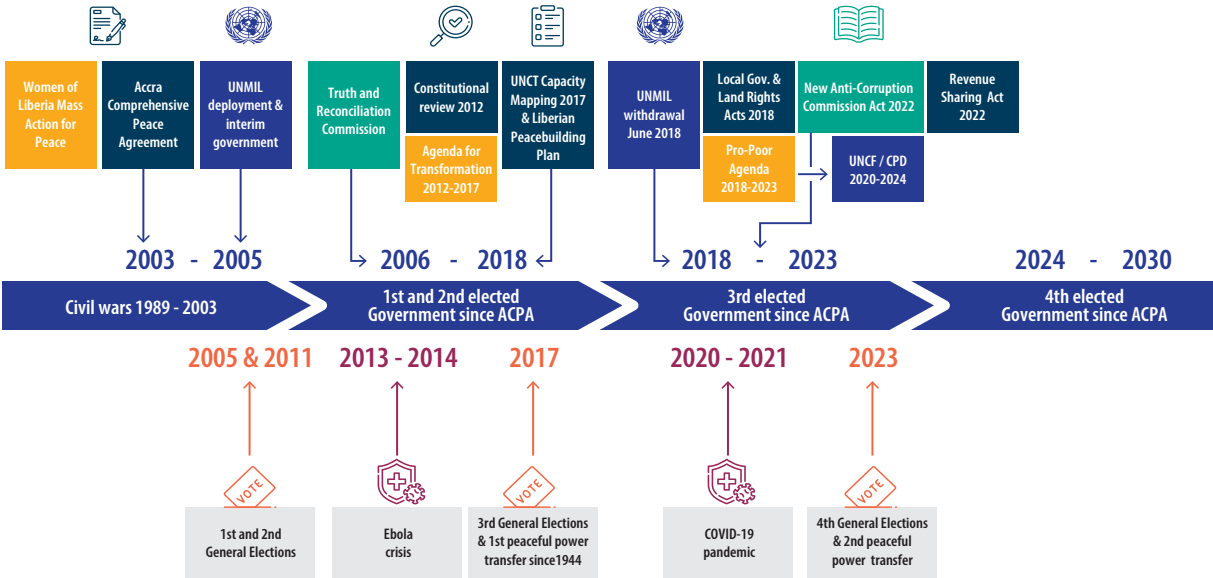
⁸ The first round was held on 10 October and the second on 14 November 2023.

⁹ The fragility can be defined as a 'negative peace', characterized by the absence of war and violence, compared to positive peace as a more lasting peace built on sustainable investments in economic development and institutions as well as societal attitude that foster peace. See Galtung, J. (1969), "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3), 167–91.

At the closure of the UNMIL mission, Liberia regained 90 per cent of the GDP losses experienced during 14 years of consecutive conflicts,¹⁰ this despite the setbacks due to the 2014–2015 Ebola crisis. After the change of state government in 2018, the roadmap to nationally owned, sustained peace and development¹¹ was renewed and embedded in the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (2018–2023). Beyond advancing security sector reform; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; transitional justice; and the rule of law, addressing the drivers of conflict required overcoming distrust in Liberia’s social fabric, transforming the economy, and building social cohesion.

In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Liberian economy struggled to overcome the vacuum left by the UNMIL drawdown. While the country capitalized on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis for the COVID-19 response, structural issues and the root causes of inequality, poverty, and conflict went largely unaddressed.

GRAPH 1. Liberia timeline of events



With 74.5 per cent of the population below the age of 35¹² and marked by long-term unemployment and poverty, investments in physical infrastructure, human capital, and livelihood generation remain critical not only for stability and peace but also for fighting violence against women. Poverty remained on the rise since 2014, with 38.6 per cent of households below the extreme poverty line, which increased to 51.0 per cent in 2020, pronounced especially in rural areas (71.6 per cent).¹³ Liberia faces a major development hurdle due to its low Human Capital Index (0.32), one of the lowest in the world, along with the Gender

¹⁰ Based on estimates of UNMIL. See United Nations Peacekeeping (2018), “Mano River Basin, 25 years of peacekeeping,” <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mano-river-basin-25-years-of-peacekeeping#:~:text=In%201993%2C%20the%20UN%20Security,in%20the%20Mano%20River%20Basin>.

¹¹ Defined in the framework of the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan, the Joint Government UN Transition Plan, and the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding, and Reconciliation (2013–2030).

¹² Liberia National Population and Housing Census 2022 Final Results: total population is approximately 5.25 million (49.6% female, 50.4% male).

¹³ World Bank (2021), “Poverty and Equity Brief”; World Bank (2023), “Liberia Poverty Assessment.”

Inequality Index (164 out of 191).¹⁴ The under-representation of women in the political sphere,¹⁵ exclusion from socio-economic development, and sexual violence experienced during the war and that still permeates all levels of society¹⁶ are only some of key factors hindering Liberia's development progress.

Liberia is highly vulnerable to external shocks,¹⁷ such as commodity price fluctuations, a growth model based on the extractive sector, concessions to foreign companies (especially rubber, iron ore, and palm oil), and negative climate and environmental impacts – all of which undermine the potential for local value addition, decent work, and inclusive growth.¹⁸ Building resilience to shocks and developing coping mechanisms of vulnerable households remained critical, considering Liberia's economic dependency on natural resources, its high climate change vulnerability score of 0.606, and its low readiness score of 0.283.¹⁹

The tight fiscal space and limited domestic revenue mobilization,²⁰ coupled with deep-seated and rampant corruption,²¹ left significant investment needs in basic infrastructures (roads, electricity/power, transportation, schools, and health facilities) unmet, to the detriment of the most vulnerable populations and counties.²² The underfunding of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) was estimated at \$1 billion, while the financing needs to achieve climate and green growth ambitions by 2025 were estimated at \$460 million, with none/to limited private sector engagement.²³

Even with notable progress in terms of rebuilding government capacity, restoring rule of law, and ensuring rights and freedoms over the past two decades,²⁴ the stakes in the elections were high, given the levels of frustration and distrust in public institutions. Against the trend of rising coups in West Africa since 2020,²⁵ Liberia's war-weariness and national drive towards reconciliation, coupled with security reforms, promoted the nation-wide plea for peace and stability, and a second peaceful transition of power.²⁶

1.5 UNDP in Liberia and country programme under review

UNDP's presence in Liberia since 1977 focused on supporting institution building and capacity development to build back better – from post-war reconstruction to the multiple crises the country faced over the past two decades. During the transition and post-UNMIL, UNDP took the lead in the core areas of Security and Peace and Governance and Transparency. Apart from long-term development objectives, the past and current programme cycle were characterized by crisis response, recovery, and resilience building. The

¹⁴ UNDP (2022), "Human Development Report, GII."

¹⁵ Liberia's female representation is less than 11%, compared to the average percentage of women in national parliaments of all sub-Saharan Africa (26%) and for West Africa (17%). See UNDP (2022), "Towards a More Equally Equal Liberia: The case for a mandatory gender quota."

¹⁶ According to the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection's annual statistical report on gender-based violence, sexual violence remains on the rise, particularly during the pandemic. Some 1,975 cases were reported in 2022, 73.7% of which were rape, sexual assault, and other forms of sexual violations.

¹⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic further weakened the economy, which had started to rebound in 2021 driven by exports of commodities. While inflation remained contained, the government's fiscal position worsened significantly, with the fiscal deficit rising from 2.4% of GDP in 2021 to 6.9% in 2022, along with currency depreciation and increased food prices. See World Bank (2023), "Economic Outlook."

¹⁸ The informal employment rate is estimated in 79.9%, with those in vulnerable employment making up 79.5% of the population, particularly affecting women (88.4% women vs. 66.8% men). Data based on the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2016) and World Bank Data (2022).

¹⁹ Liberia ranks 177th of 181 countries, compared to Sierra Leone (166) and Côte d'Ivoire (141). University of Notre Dame ND-Gain Index (2022).

²⁰ Compared to other West African countries, Liberia is among the lowest performers, being insufficient to sustain core public service delivery. Between 2012 and 2020 the governments operating expenses exceeded the domestic revenue collection by 4% of the GDP. Source: World Bank (2021), "Finding Fiscal Space."

²¹ Liberia's scores on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2023, ranking 25/100) declined 12 points since 2016. Although some reforms were introduced in 2022 (e.g., the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission Act, a whistleblower protection law), impunity remains high compared to neighboring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, which has increased 13 points since 2013, as well as Sierra Leone, albeit to a lesser extent. Source: Transparency International (2023), Corruption Perception Index.

²² Inequalities are particularly marked in the North Central and Northwest, notably inadequate employment opportunities, provision of services, and infrastructure. See Map 6, Annex 4.

²³ African Development Bank (2023), "Liberia Economic Outlook."

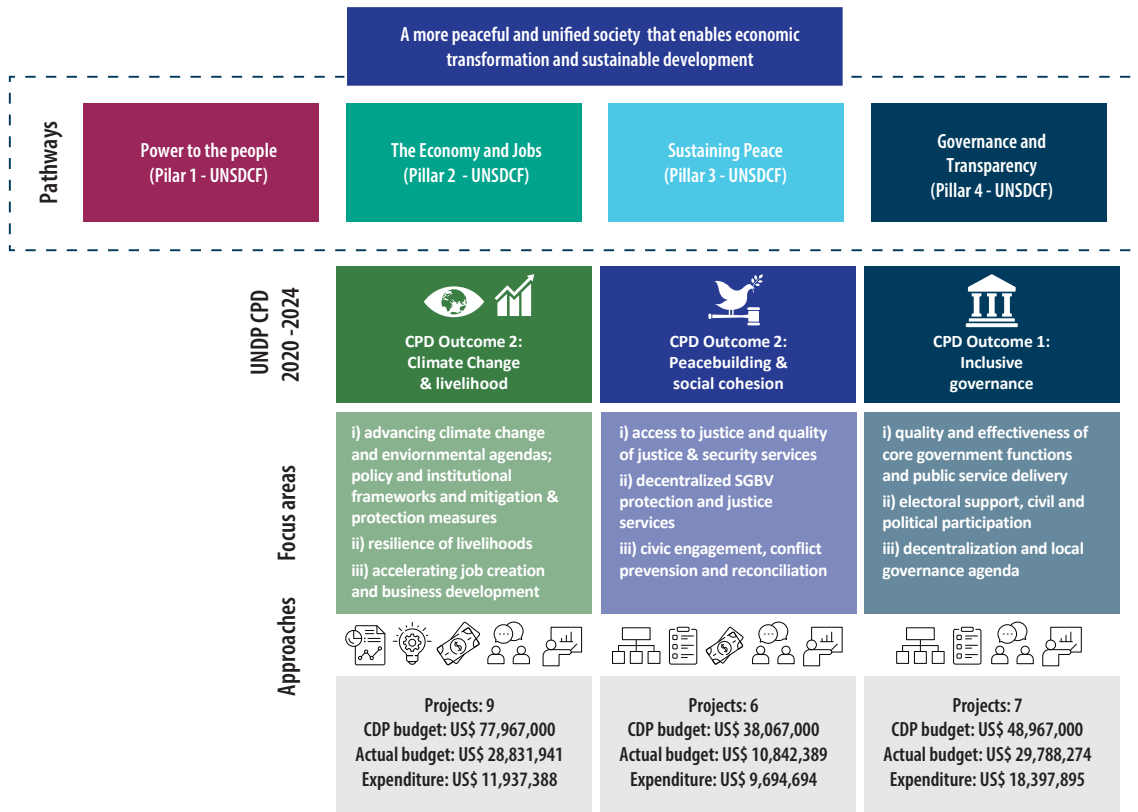
²⁴ Liberia is rated partly free (64/100) on the Global Freedom Status (Freedom House 2024), and ranked 59/137 on the Governance Index (BTI 2024).

²⁵ Six successful and two attempted coups. Source: Powell, J. and Thyne, C. (2022), "Coups d'etat, 1950 to present."

²⁶ See Annexes 2 to 4 for additional data.

UNDP country programme 2020–2024 was defined around key priorities set out in the PAPD 2018–2023, aligned with the 2030 Agenda, and aiming to contribute to three outcome areas articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020–2024 for Liberia. These were: **Outcome 1 – Inclusive Governance**, closely interlinked with **Outcome 2 – Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion**, and **Outcome 3 – Inclusive Growth**, with the integration of *environmental sustainability, climate change, and disaster risk management*.

GRAPH 2. UNDP Liberia Country Programme Document snapshot



To achieve positive peace, development, reconciliation, and prosperity, the assumption underlying the **programme's overall theory of change** was that capacity-building and institutional strengthening lead to inclusive and equitable governance, accountable and transparent institutions that ensure the implementation of policies and laws, and improved quality of public services at national and decentralized levels. This, in turn, leads to trust building and a positive climate for investment and economic growth, thereby overcoming critical structural constraints to development and equality, bridging gaps for rural communities, youth, and women, and ultimately leading to social cohesion and lasting peace.

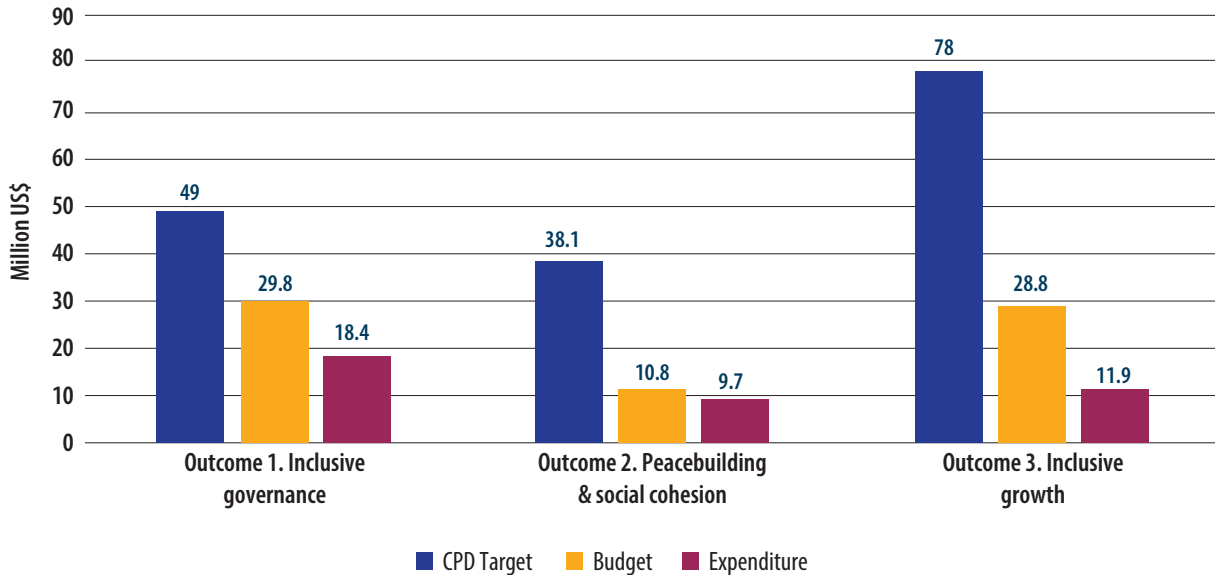
The CPD aimed for a geographically focused approach aligned with the PAPD and the assessment of development corridors and divides,²⁷ while adhering to the principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB). It also envisioned balancing short-term responses stemming from UNMIL's legacy with Quick Impact Projects²⁸ and

²⁷ Counties were prioritized based on persistent poverty levels, low social development indices, and recorded sexual and gender-based violence. These were: Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Grand Cape Mount, as well as Montserrado, Sinoe, and Grand Bassa due to their climate vulnerability and environmental risks. Other interventions were aimed nation-wide, e.g., electoral support and the decentralization process.

²⁸ These are characterized as small-scale, low cost, and rapid implementable projects aimed at establishing confidence in the mission and its mandate.

crises (e.g., Ebola), and the transition to medium- and long-term development outcomes. Mainstreaming resilience into programming proved particularly pertinent, given Liberia’s unpredictable political economy and external shocks affecting CPD implementation from the outset.

FIGURE 1. CPD Target, budget & expenditures by outcome



For its implementation, UNDP’s CPD total financial projection amounted to \$165 million, which represented 21 per cent of the UNSDCF common budgetary framework. The funding gap at approval was 71 per cent for the total CPD, and notably high for Outcomes 1 and 2 (64 per cent), where other agencies also had lower contributions.²⁹ Peace and Justice (SDG 16) and Gender Equality (SDG 5) represented 37 per cent and 32 per cent of activities in the Joint Work Plan during this cycle. UNDP spearheaded in these areas, and overall executed a total of 68 activities to achieve the joint objectives and targets.

Figures 1 and 2 show the financial size of the outcomes, including budget and expenditures, and the latter in terms of direct implementation modality vs. national implementation modality (DIM/NIM). Outcomes 1 and 2 have the highest number of initiatives implemented through DIM, in contrast to the objectives of good governance, accountability, and trust building in public institutions. The funding structure is composed of 51 per cent bilateral/multilateral funds, 43 per cent regular resources, 5 per cent vertical trust funds, and 1 per cent government cost sharing.³⁰

While the CDP, in its design, prioritized 7 of the 15 counties,³¹ UNDP implemented projects across all of them.³² Figure 3 maps the implementation of the CP across the counties by outcome areas and estimated expenditures.³³

²⁹ Approximately \$797 million was projected to implement the UNSDCF. The resource requirement gap at approval across all agencies was 51%. Given the COVID-19 crisis, resources were redirected, and gaps increased between 2021 and 2023, notably for sustainable economic development. Outcomes 1 and 2 accumulated execution rates reached 35% of the initial UNSDCF budget, with a remaining funding gap of 45%. Source: UNSDCF Annual Reports: 2021, 2022, and 2023.

³⁰ Financial data extracted from corporate platforms Atlas and Quantum. Date of extraction: 15 March 2024.

³¹ Seven counties were prioritized in the CPD design because the country context analysis showed that these counties faced the most significant socio-economic and climate challenges and had the largest populations. This decision was made due to limited UNDP funding, which could not support development activities across all 15 counties at that time.

³² See Annex 3 for additional financial data and Annex 4 for additional maps.

³³ See Annex 5 for a detailed overview of the country portfolio.

FIGURE 2. Expenditures by implementation modality

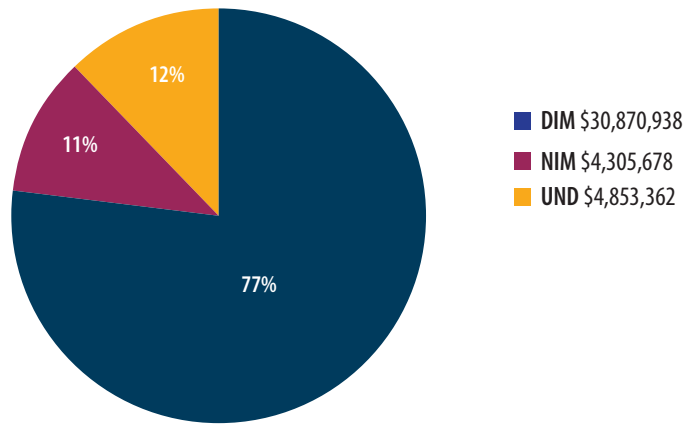
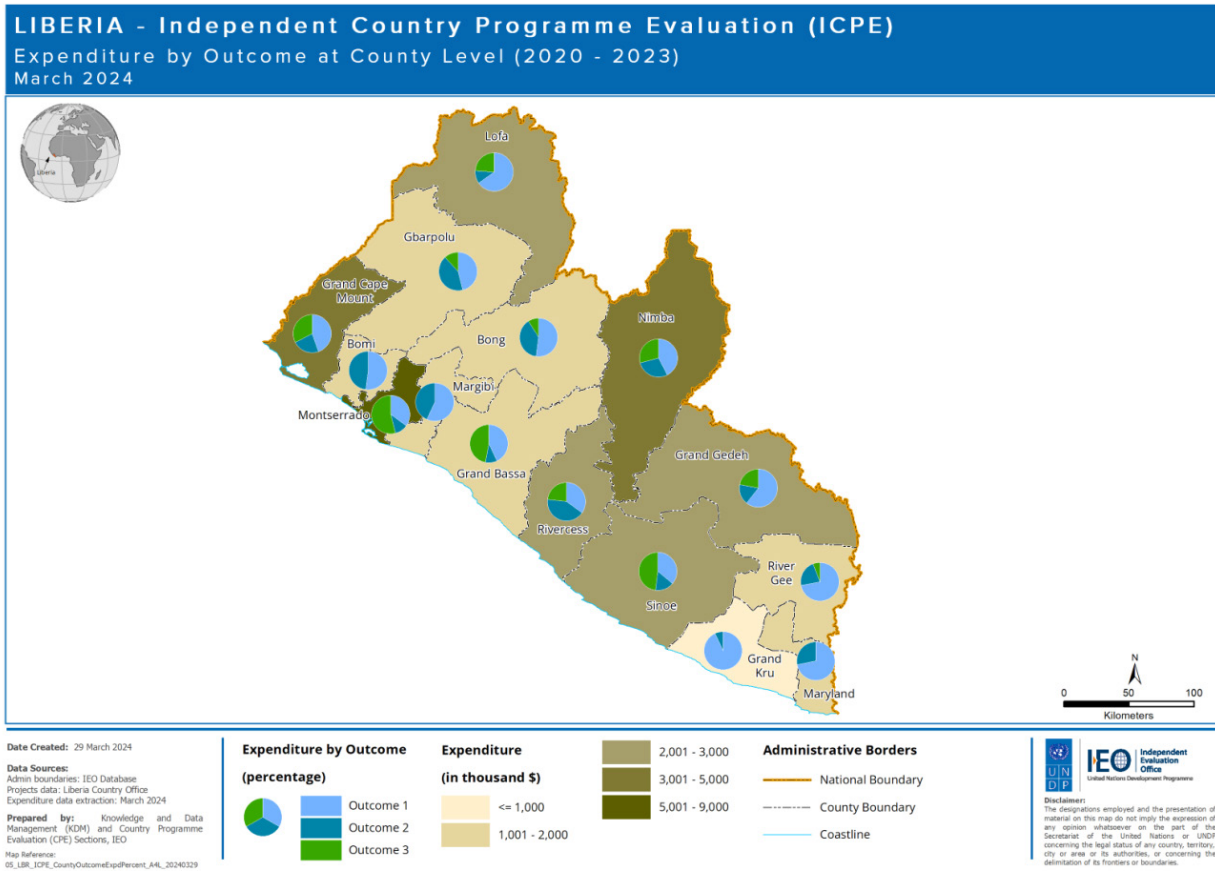


FIGURE 3. CPD Outcome distribution by county and expenditures



CHAPTER 2

FINDINGS



This chapter presents the results of the programme and contribution analysis, along with the assessment of operational and cross-cutting issues. The findings are organized into three sections, in line with the key evaluation questions and criteria³⁴ (1) UNDP's strategic and programmatic responsiveness and coherence; (2) UNDP's contributions to programme objectives and sustainable development results; and (3) main factors, including strategies, approaches, and cross-cutting aspects that influenced UNDP's performance and broader adoption of results.

2.1 Programme responsiveness and coherence

Finding 1. Relevance. In line with the evolving nature of the country's peace and development trajectory, UNDP Liberia's programmatic offer reflected long-standing support and positioning in core thematic areas and the organization's flagship work. It supported national efforts to address both the drivers of conflict and inclusive sustainable development, with a stronger focus on resilience for its people-centred implementation at the subnational level.

In response to the renewed and revised national priorities, the CPD fully aligned with national development strategies for the four pillars and targets outlined in the PAPD.³⁵ Driven by objectives towards domesticating the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, UNDP emphasized maximizing an integrated, issue-based approach through joint programming and domestic development financing. The shift in this cycle involved moving from a strategic focus on policy reforms and institutional development, and to a greater extent towards people-centred and innovative demonstrations, policy implementation and monitoring, and downstream initiatives.

For its delivery, the CPD was anchored in flagship and successor programmes focused on rule of law, peace and security, electoral support, decentralization, and gender-based violence (Outcomes 1 and 2). Outcome 3, which lacked well-defined core interventions, required more investment from UNDP to meet the set targets. The livelihood and employment creation component was largely sustained by UNDP funding, and somewhat hampered by the lack of an overarching strategic framework both at the national policy level and the corporate level (i.e., conceptual framework adapted to the Liberian context). For climate change and environmental priorities, the country office made great strides in securing, together with government partners, crucial vertical and bilateral funding to advance Liberia's policies on these matters, including the revised Nationally Determined Contribution.³⁶

Notable gaps remained across all outcomes to address identified priorities in the CPD, especially in the areas of rule of law, anti-corruption, government transparency and accountability, as well as work in the extractive sector and with the private sector at large. Insufficient funding and overly ambitious forecasts, coupled with expectations from government partners to maintain UNMIL support levels, burdened the implementation from the outset. CPD implementation was largely influenced by funding opportunities and donor agendas, while also addressing national demands for nationwide coverage for certain initiatives, such as decentralization and electoral support. As a result, interventions expanded to more counties and a focus

³⁴ The criteria – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability – are addressed within the four Key Evaluation Questions and the sub-questions, in accordance with the Performance Rating System. Details and results of the Performance Rating are presented in Annex 8.

³⁵ Pillar I: Power to the People; Pillar II: The Economy and Jobs; Pillar III: Sustaining the Peace; and Pillar IV: Governance and Transparency (PAPD 2018–2023).

³⁶ In 2023 resources were raised from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the EU on climate initiatives through the Community-Based Forestry and Protected Area Management and Leh Go Green projects. These are gear towards conservation, forest management and biodiversity protection.

on institutional support over local and community-led initiatives, especially in the rule of law programme. While responding to commitments to leave no one behind, UNDP risked spreading the overall country programme too thinly.

Finding 2. Responsiveness to changes and emerging needs. The implementation of the CPD was hampered from the outset by external shocks that adversely affected Liberia’s development trajectory, and posed even greater challenges to sustaining peace dividends and overcoming aid dependency. The country office demonstrated a high degree of responsiveness to emerging needs of institutional counterparts, which somewhat diverted attention from strategic priorities and also implied larger funding shortfalls.

The UN Country Team (UNCT) provided essential support to Liberia’s COVID-19 response and various ministries. Aligning with the government’s strategy, the UN Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP), developed under UNDP’s technical leadership, reaffirmed priorities to rebuild and recover better, to which the CPD and UNDP interventions remained fully responsive.³⁷ UNDP support to the Ministry of Health (MoH) for the Global Fund Programme³⁸ also became more pertinent in light of the second large-scale health crisis and in response to the PAPD Pillar Goal IV – Inclusive, Decentralized Governance; and the SERP Pillar 1– Protecting Health Systems and Services.

The redirection of resources towards response and recovery efforts increased overall CPD funding needs and created new gaps in terms of the government’s financial commitments (i.e., PAPD funding and government cost-sharing for development initiatives). Institutional weaknesses, including capacity gaps and risks to transparency and accountability, hampered the expected transition from the direct to national implementation modality. According to interviewed stakeholders, this had different implications in terms of high operational costs and human resource commitment for UNDP on the one hand, and national ownership, legitimacy, and accountability on the other.

High levels of corruption and impunity that continued to permeate politics and public services,³⁹ and slow progress in combating it, contributed, among other factors, to a decline in donor interest in Liberia. The global economic fallout from the pandemic and other crises further exacerbated the significant drop in official development assistance that Liberia experienced since 2015.⁴⁰ After years of high attention, investment, and foreign support leading up to the Ebola response, Liberia lacked a realistic development financing strategy following UNMIL’s withdrawal.

In Liberia’s aid dependent and contracted economy, stability and social cohesion relied heavily on international partners to maintain public services and to ensure state responsibilities, including social protection. In this context, UNDP faced the challenge of a broad mandate, while still being perceived by key government partners as carrying forward UNMIL’s legacy. This perception persisted despite the overall role of the UN Country Team and the changes in responsibilities due to the delinking process and the establishment of the Resident Coordinator Office. At the same time, the evaluation found that UNDP was largely, and to some extent overly, responsive to government requests. This presented the country office with the challenge of balancing short-term needs and priorities, including operational support, with

³⁷ UNDP contributed to Pillar III: Protecting jobs, medium and small-sized enterprises, and informal sector workers; Pillar IV: Macroeconomic response and multilateral cooperation; and Pillar V: Social cohesion and community resilience. See UN Liberia, “COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan” (UN Country Team, August 2020).

³⁸ This support includes strengthening programmatic and governance capacities, subnational oversight, financial and asset management, and monitoring and evaluation capacity.

³⁹ Serious cases of corruption at the highest levels of government under former President George Weah, with three senior government officials sanctioned by the United States, but never prosecuted in Liberia.

⁴⁰ The net overseas development assistance percentage of Liberia’s Gross National Income decreased from 37.1% in 2015 to 19.9% in 2018 and 12.9% in 2022. Source: OECD, International Development Statistics online database (2023).

strategic investments and the pursuit of long-term strategic objectives. While generally aligned with the CPD, UNSDCF, and PAPD frameworks, support for dispersed but still resource-intensive and time-consuming actions and activities did not always add strategic and transformational value.

Additionally, the government's limited absorption capacities created risks and bottlenecks for jointly implemented development initiatives. In this regard, the evaluation found that there was scope for strengthening ownership and consultation of both government counterparts and other implementing partners, starting from the projects' design phase. This was also recognized by different interviewees regarding needs assessments and consultations with target groups at the local level. While feedback and oversight mechanisms with partners and donors were enhanced, following lessons learned, project documents and interviews with a range of stakeholders revealed weaknesses in terms of evidenced-informed design and implementation. Feedback from final beneficiaries or end users of services was less systematically used and integrated.⁴¹ Moreover, despite the effort to drive innovation and promote regional and international approaches, there were still challenges in making them fit and adapt to the Liberian context. This was most noticeable in the area of rule of law, access to justice, and work related to gender-based violence (see details in Finding 6), as well as initiatives replicated or adapted from regional experiences, such as the Growth Accelerator and Accelerated Community Development Programme (see details in Finding 11).

Finding 3. Portfolio approach. The country office piloted UNDP's innovative portfolio approach process, moving from standalone/single-issue projects to strengthening programmatic coherence, resource efficiency, and effectiveness. With some positive gains already evidenced, challenges remained, such as the adaptation of operational and M&E structures for effective portfolio management, alongside the capitalization of cross-fertilization and the strategic orientation of interventions. The geographic dispersion of projects also limited coherent implementation of the portfolio approach.

The shift to the portfolio approach over two years resulted in merging the first two CPD outcomes into an inclusive governance portfolio and integrating components of Outcome 3 more cohesively into an inclusive green growth (IGG) portfolio. While it could be seen only as a reorganization of the existing interventions, the country office aimed to address existing gaps with respect to internal coherence (i.e., breaking down silos) and overall strategic orientation of the CPD interventions towards system transformation. Additionally, the need to improve external coherence, particularly through greater inter-institutional collaboration, as well as more efficient resource allocations were key objectives.

When aligning existing projects with portfolios, clear interrelated outcomes were defined according to the CPD. This included linking CPD outputs from a cross-cutting perspective of issues (e.g., environmental protection and green jobs) to support shared development objectives. Additionally, the IGG portfolio introduced a new strategic outcome on rural infrastructures, poverty reduction, and livelihoods development. Yet, the portfolio approach did not fully succeed in better articulating top-down and bottom-up processes to drive systemic change and the transformation of state-society relations. It remained focused on assumptions about governance systems,⁴² rather than fostering locally driven solutions and development. This also includes defining clear and differentiated strategies to significantly reinforce the roles of women, youth, or people with disabilities (PWD) as drivers of change, despite concerted efforts to mainstream LNOB and gender through the portfolio approach.

⁴¹ For more detail see Findings 6, 8, 11, and 14.

⁴² This includes the government's success in fighting corruption and promoting effective, accountable, and transparent performance of state functions, resulting in the implementation of policy and legal frameworks, appropriate use of public resources, and targeted investment in key development priorities.

To operationalize the portfolio approach, the CO made management and operational adjustments, moving away from siloed project teams to portfolio management units and engaging national stakeholders in joint portfolio meetings. Despite progress and senior leadership commitment, the whole-in-office transformation was not yet fully achieved. Some cross-portfolio synergies were strengthened (e.g., peace and security and electoral violence prevention; land management and conflict prevention; environmental protection and livelihoods), but not all opportunities were leveraged. The area-based approach, particularly for the IGG portfolio, was not followed through. Among the hindering factors, three stood out: (i) the difficulty of aligning projects with special governance structures with the portfolio management, i.e., UN joint programmes; (ii) the readiness of existing financial, operational, M&E, and reporting structures for portfolio management; and (iii) the overall understanding of the approach and the dynamic management practices, which require a change of mindsets, attitudes, and ways of operating.

Expectations that portfolios would enhance development financing and resource mobilization, including pooled funding, did not fully materialize. Given the pilot stage of this new approach, both at the corporate and country office level, continued effort and engagement is required to fully overcome the project-based approach of major donors and UNDP's business model. This entails a clear engagement strategy and marketing of the new value proposition, i.e., new partnerships and working jointly with other UN agencies. It is important to recognize that the CO remained without a Resident Representative as of May 2023, adding to the workload of the senior management during an election year.⁴³ Competition for funding among agencies also continues to be a reality, in addition to the increasing shift of donor funding to international NGOs and CSOs. Nevertheless, donors recognized the interest and value of joint UN initiatives, and as a modality to be further strengthened. Thus, integrated portfolios would be a way forward. Ultimately, portfolio funding targets were not met during this pilot phase, and implementation was driven primarily by existing projects and UNDP funding.

2.2 UNDP's contributions to programme objectives and sustainable development results

The qualitative assessment was based on analysis of the correlation between project and programme results and their contribution to the expected outputs under each outcome, and consequently to the overall outcome objectives.

Inclusive, Effective, Transparent, and Accountable Governance – linked to CPD Outcomes 1 and 2

Finding 4. Enabling environment and policy support. UNDP directed much of its support to institutional efforts to effectively implement legal and policy frameworks derived from the previous cycle or to develop new policy instruments for improved functioning and delivery of essential public services. UNDP's role in convening stakeholders, positioning issues on the political agenda, and facilitating processes and mechanisms to foster alliances, exchange, and inclusion of non-governmental actors was widely recognized. Enabling environment level results and changes required long-term efforts and time to mature. In many cases, these processes were ambitious and remained subject to political will and leadership to move the reform agenda effectively forward.

⁴³ In October 2024 the country office remained headed by an acting Resident Representative.

In all thematic areas under the inclusive governance portfolio, UNDP provided technical advisory services and facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogue and consensus-building around reform and policy agendas. To advance and sustain Liberia's peace and development trajectory, efforts to strengthen the enabling environment ranged from advocacy to the development of specific policies and legislation, amendments, and protocols:

- **Decentralization:** The enactment of a Revenue Sharing Act (2022) and the associated regulatory framework complemented the 2018 Local Government Act (supported by UNDP in the previous cycle) as well as the amendment of the Public Finance Management Law, helping to drive the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Government (NPD LG 2012). The NPD LG advances fiscal decentralization and redistribution, including funds derived from mining concession agreements, thus fostering economic inclusiveness through the equalization fund that targets Liberia's poorest regions.
- **Rule of Law and access to justice:** The re-enactment of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC)⁴⁴ Act, granting it autonomy from the Ministry of Justice and prosecutorial powers, supports its more effective functioning and ensures a more transparent and inclusive appointment process for LACC commissioners. The draft Corrections Service Act and the review and draft amendments to five sections of the Criminal Procedures Law addressed various key challenges linked to access to justice, rights, and guarantees of fair trials, case and prison management, and conditions to fulfil international standards. The amendments suggested semi-autonomy for the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (delinked from the Ministry of Justice to increase the resource capacity), a pathway for the activation of a parole board to reduce prison overcrowding, and other measures such as plea bargaining, conditions for arrest, standards on preliminary examination, and legal aid.⁴⁵ In addition, UNDP supported the development and adoption of an Alternative Dispute Resolution policy by the Ministry of Justice and a law proposal to help reduce court congestion, prison overcrowding, and pre-trial detention, as well as harmful and discriminatory traditional practices, particularly affecting women's access to justice.⁴⁶ Regarding gender-based violence, the legislative and policy environment was supported through inter-agency efforts and advocacy, including the final adoption of the Domestic Violence Act and the revision of the Rape Law, case management, and standard operational procedures, among others.⁴⁷
- **Elections:** The draft amendment of certain sections of the Election Law (1986, 2014) addressed the appointment and tenure of National Elections Commission officials, the election complaint procedures, and most importantly a long-term concerted advocacy effort to establish a mandatory 30 per cent gender quota for women representation in political parties. Although some sections were approved, others, including the gender quota, were vetoed by the former president in March 2023, months before the elections.⁴⁸ Other long-running advocacy efforts and pledges led to broad support from political parties, leaderships, and candidates, including the institutionalization of the Prevention of Violence Against Women in Elections and Politics (VAWiE-P) Protocol⁴⁹ and standard

⁴⁴ Inadequate budgetary allocations and human resources continued to constrain the LACC. While progress appears possible in the prosecution of low-profile cases following the passage of the Act, efforts to tackle high-level corruption remain contingent on political will, according to interviewees.

⁴⁵ Only some of the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law were signed into law, including plea bargaining, a new standard on Preliminary Examination in Cases Above the Trial Jurisdiction of Magistrates and Justices of the Peace, and the replacement of judges in the circuit courts due to retirement, illness, or in some cases corruption claims.

⁴⁶ The policy moved to the legislative drafting stage, but did not move further.

⁴⁷ Efforts to adopt the Act started before the beginning of the Spotlight Initiative in 2019, but were concluded with intensive advocacy during this cycle.

⁴⁸ Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed the gender quota in the Elections Law.

⁴⁹ The protocol was signed by 29 of 33 political parties. Source: UNDP, "Liberia Electoral Support Project Annual Report 2023."

operating procedures for electoral security and peaceful conduct of elections; the Farmington River Declaration 2023 as a commitment to non-violent, free, fair, and transparent legislative and presidential elections;⁵⁰ and the support of political parties to the gender quota proposal.

Aside from project-specific activities, UNDP supported the government through its Policy and Strategy Unit, providing orientations and technical assistance for planning processes, strategies, and action plans, including development planning and financing efforts, the national strategy for development statistics, and the roadmap for SDGs alignment, transformation, and reporting (e.g., Voluntary National Reviews, and specific studies such as on drivers of inclusive and sustainable development⁵¹). An important milestone was the conduct of the National Population and Housing Census, jointly supported by the UNCT.⁵² While progress was made in terms of data generation with digital tools, constraints remained related to resource availability, national capacities, and use of data for evidence-based planning and policy-making.

The support to objectives of resource efficiency, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability (i.e., CPD Output 1.4)⁵³ was geared towards strengthening the LACC, policy dialogue with all integrity institutions, awareness-raising and media campaigns, and digitalization to strengthen anti-corruption efforts – all of which resulted in some new tools and platforms. The latter included the e-platform and App ‘TALKAY’ managed by the LACC for secure reporting and tracking of potential corruption cases, particularly targeting four national institutions with low records of service delivery.⁵⁴ Launched in 2023, its implementation and acceptance proved complicated. As with the development of other digital tools, the robustness and continuity of data collection and entry, as well as the management and response to feedback, showed shortcomings, ultimately compromising its intention to promote citizen engagement, oversight, and trust-building.

The document review and the interviews conducted indicate that issues around transparency and public accountability greatly challenged efforts to build trust among citizens, which is a critical prerequisite for the transformation towards a positive peace. In some cases, stakeholders interviewed highlighted that policy and legislative reforms were too ambitious given the structural constraints, the lack of incentives to implement them, as well as still limited social accountability and oversight processes.

Finding 5. Inclusive, transparent, and peaceful elections.⁵⁵ The 2023 elections marked a pivotal milestone that tested not only the consolidation of the peace process and democracy in Liberia but also the contributions of the UNCT, particularly UNDP as the main provider of electoral assistance to the National Election Commission (NEC) and other electoral stakeholders. The Liberia Electoral Support Project (LESP) generated positive learning on how self-reliance and national ownership of democratic processes can be built gradually and over time.

⁵⁰ Leaders of 27 of the 33 political parties signed the enhanced and comprehensive declaration, building on the foundation of the initial pledge signed in 2017. Source: UNDP, “Liberia Electoral Support Project Annual Report 2023.”

⁵¹ The study on drivers of development aimed to feed into the development of the next multi-year national development strategy. Other studies supported were the national report on the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development, the report on sectoral policies for productivity and inclusive growth, the report on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the informal sector, and the sector portfolio review.

⁵² These actions, funded by UNDP core resources, are linked to Output 1.1: Capacities developed across the whole of government to integrate development plans and budgets, and to analyse progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, using innovative and data-driven solutions.

⁵³ CPD Output 1.4: Institutions and systems strengthened to reduce corruption at national and subnational levels to maximize resource availability for pro-poor development.

⁵⁴ Liberia Electricity Corporation, the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, and the Forestry Development Authority. Source: UNDP, “Liberia Annual Report 2022.”

⁵⁵ CDP Output 1.3: Electoral processes strengthened for inclusive, transparent, and peaceful conduct elections.

UNDP's fourth consecutive cycle of electoral support, managing the multi-donor basket fund,⁵⁶ took on added importance during this CPD as the first nationally administered elections (including most of the funding) managed and secured by the Liberian authorities. UNDP election support emphasized ownership, integrity, inclusiveness, transparency, and social cohesion, as well as improved coordination and synergistic inter-agency collaboration. Novel approaches launched included the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process; multi-sector engagement for voter education and mobilization; community and county-based networks and mechanisms for early warning and early response; massive digital and social media outreach together with a digital fact-checker to combat misinformation; and youth engagement and mobilization (in collaboration with United Nations Volunteers Liberia).

Lessons learned⁵⁷ and an early UN Needs Assessment Mission in 2019 informed the LESP design and tailoring of strategies to address numerous and emerging challenges. These included delays in the disbursement and constraints of the election budget, procurement issues with the BVR kits, the revision process of the New Election Law, and delays in voter registration and education activities, among others.⁵⁸ Controversies also arose over the National Census delays and results affecting electoral district delimitation. Despite these obstacles, stakeholders and observers assessed the 2023 elections very positively, as efficient and well-managed, diligent and transparent, showing organizational improvements from the first round to the run-off.⁵⁹ The Liberia-led National Steering Committee on Elections, co-chaired by the Minister of Justice, the UN Resident Coordinator, and the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Representative to Liberia, facilitated effective collaboration. Joint efforts by election stakeholders and political leaders, along with a collaborative approach to identify and address challenges, were highly praised. Key aspects of the strategy and prioritized approaches covered the following components:

- **Transparency and trust building.** Given the low public trust levels in the NEC, UNDP's approach focused on NEC-led processes with technical assistance⁶⁰ to different departments and at the county level. Embedding 14 experts and consultants within the offices made a remarkable difference in terms of knowledge transfer and capacity development, according to interviewees. The BVR process⁶¹ was crucial for improving the voter roll's credibility, mitigating fraud, and generating disaggregated data⁶² to inform decision-making (e.g., the needs of people with disabilities and measures to ensure youth and women's participation). Effective visibility, strategic communication, and timely information sharing, both internally and with the media, were crucial for building confidence. Enhanced collaboration among NEC, media stakeholders, and security forces, including a revised media code of conduct and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for preventing electoral violence, helped address misinformation and violent rhetoric.⁶³ Multiple communication channels, including the 'iVerify' digital

⁵⁶ The Liberia Electoral Support Project (LESP) was supported by Sweden (\$4.65 million), Ireland (\$1.6 million), and UNDP (\$2.3 million). Important funding from the EU was mobilized during 2023 for the implementation of the 'Promoting a More Inclusive and Accountable Democracy' Project (2023–2026). Total budget: 2020–2022: \$5.8 million; 2023–2026: 18.4 million (est.). The electoral process was also supported through other initiatives, including USAID, UN Women, National Democratic Institute, and GIZ.

⁵⁷ From the 2017 general elections, the Report on the National Elections Commission, and the lessons learned with external stakeholders across the country on the 8 December 2020 special senatorial election and the March–April 2021 national referendum.

⁵⁸ UNDP, "Liberia Annual Report 2022" and LESP, "Annual Report 2023."

⁵⁹ ECOWAS, Preliminary Declaration – Liberia General Elections – 10 October 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) Liberia: Preliminary Statement, 12 October 2023; EU EOM Liberia, Press Release, 16 November 2023; EU EOM, Final Report, March 2024; Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA-IEOM) Report, "2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections."

⁶⁰ A comprehensive organizational and capacity needs assessment of the NEC and electoral stakeholders was conducted, along with the revision of the NEC Strategic Plan, procedures, and regulations, to adapt and tailor a capacity development strategy accordingly.

⁶¹ UNDP supported NEC, in collaboration with ECOWAS, in the conduct of the BVR Feasibility Study. Source: UNDP, "Liberia Electoral Support Project: Feasibility Study for possible introduction of a new technology in voter registration and elections in Liberia," June 2021.

⁶² For the first time, NEC also collected the data on persons living with disabilities (PWD), thanks to the biometric voter registration. Nevertheless, only 12,399 persons self-indicated as PWD. Youth and gender disaggregated turnout is also available for the first time as a result of the move to the BVR.

⁶³ Synergies with the UN Women Joint Peacebuilding Fund project on Women's Political Participation were leveraged to ensure greater protection for female journalists, female law enforcement officers, and women's role in electoral violence prevention.

electoral fact-checker platform, improved public information and awareness.⁶⁴ Upgrades to key NEC Data Centre applications (voter registration, candidate nomination, voter management system, results portal) further bolstered the credibility and integrity of the electoral systems. Notably, ensuring the traceability of results by observers and party agents and the timely transmission of results from polling stations to the NEC Central Results Management System were highlighted as game changers.

- **Institutional capacity and accountability.** Another strategic approach to foster institutionalization of capacities and sustainability was the provision of the interactive and high-impact Building Resources in Democracy, Governance, and Elections programme (BRIDGE). The programme accredited 24 key staff of NEC, including magistrates and other electoral stakeholders (54:46 male-female ratio), and training modules were replicated by facilitators.⁶⁵ This gives NEC an autonomy and capacity to conduct quality training independently in the future, and supports the effort to transform the work-in-silos culture.
- **Civic voter education (CVE),** with strong focus on first time voters, women's participation, and inclusion of people with disabilities was massively rolled-out through 81 CVE cells,⁶⁶ comprising 243 CBOs, eight CSOs, and national volunteers deployed across 19 magisterial offices. Bottlenecks and areas of improvement were highlighted in reports and interviews, such as the timeliness of the CVE activities (due to disbursement delays by the government and UNDP grants), budget constraints, harmonization of the methodology and approaches used in different counties, as well as more attention to quality assurance, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms. An earlier start and engagement of relevant stakeholders, such as with the Ministry of Education, Liberian National Bar Association, or the Governance Commission, potentially could have strengthened delivery and results. Despite the extensive information, communication, and education efforts, the percentage of invalid votes cast remained at the level of 2017. Most stakeholders stressed the importance of not limiting CVE to the electoral process, but of broadening its scope of civic education and integrating it into school curricula.
- **Early warning and early response (EWER) and conflict prevention.** Aside from pledges for peaceful elections, support for the resolution of electoral disputes and the consolidation of EWER mechanisms involved and articulated a range of electoral stakeholders, both national and local actors, along the security and justice chains. Partnerships with the Peacebuilding Office, the Liberia National Police, and the Liberia National Bar Association facilitated the training of 427 EWER officers and 4,000 law enforcement officers. It also supported the integration of the VAWiE-P Protocol into the national EWER platform and decentralized mechanisms (e.g., community neighbourhood watch, county and community peace committees, and youth agents of peace), albeit with difficulties in making it fully operational (i.e., coordination issues and lack of clarity about referral pathways and response mechanisms).

Moreover, a proliferation of situation rooms and early warning networks during the election period was observed.⁶⁷ The evaluation revealed that, although collectively effective in identifying, reporting, and responding to electoral issues, there was scope for UNDP to play a stronger role in advocating for the consolidation of early warning networks and promoting stronger coordination and information sharing. The deployment of the Liberia National Police in most polling stations was perceived as a sign of strengthening, despite late funding for election security and overall resource constraints. According to reports and interviews, incidents reported were limited and generally well-managed, following established SOPs and

⁶⁴ NEC developed and disseminated 57 press releases to over 200 social media pages daily. The Liberia Electoral Support Project (LESP) also supported the development of seven election-related SMS and supported NEC in negotiating free dissemination to over 3.5 million mobile phones. Over 200 claims of fake news, disinformation, and hate speech were tracked, verified, and made public. Source: "LESP Annual Report 2023."

⁶⁵ LESP Annual Report 2023.

⁶⁶ Cells aimed to bring the CVE closer to the people as they were established in each of the 73 electoral districts and had a close connection to the local communities, including through shared dialects.

⁶⁷ These included spaces such as the Women's Situation Room supported by UN Women and UNDP, the Ministry of Internal Affairs situation room, the Liberia Peace Building Office situation room, the West African Network for Peacebuilding monitoring mechanism, and the Youth situation room.

avoiding escalation. Ultimately, interviewees recognized the importance of transforming and ensuring the sustainability of the EWER mechanisms in the post-election environment, though the political will remains a key issue.

Inclusion and removal of barriers to inclusive political participation. Significant constraints remained for a fully inclusive electoral process, particularly for women and PWD. These were observed in the process for BVR registration and set-up of polling stations (e.g., distance, accessibility, costs, and protection issues)⁶⁸ as well as the CVE. Despite efforts to develop and disseminate gender and disability sensitive materials with UNDP support, timeliness was an issue. Tactile ballots were used in the elections, but the late arrival of mock ballots and of the start of training affected the process, along with access to and conditions of polling stations, despite the initial mapping and control visits. UNDP's support for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between political parties and the NEC on women's political participation, the development and implementation of NEC's gender equality and social inclusion policy, and the VAViE-P were highlighted as achievements. Yet, entrenched patriarchal norms in political parties, limited accountability towards women's political rights, the lack of enforcement, and the continued risk of violence against women undermined efforts to strengthen women's agency to seek political office.

The balance of the electoral support efforts for the democratic progress in Liberia is altogether positive and recognizable. Given the various challenges, the credible, peaceful, and transparent electoral process echoed the collective desire, commitment, and work of all involved. A strengthened NEC and electoral actors upheld their mandates, and political freedom and violence prevention were reinforced, though the playing field was not completely level. Among the persistent challenges was the use of state resources, including media coverage, to favour the ruling party; the NEC's limited authority to enforce pre-campaigning rules; prevalent complaints such as voter trucking and underage registration; financing and operational issues; and insufficient progress in gender equality. These issues indicate the need for further work to address gaps, close loopholes, raise awareness, and revise the legal framework.⁶⁹

2023 Elections: Facts, figures, and main achievements

- Voter registration increased by 13% in 2023 to more than 2.47 million (50.1% female/49.9% male), compared to 2017.
- BVR indicate 12,399 persons as people with disabilities.
- The number of female candidates fell short of international/regional standards and commitments by the political parties (15% female vs. 85% male).
- Voter turnout of 78.9% in the 1st round and 66.1% in the run-off, compared to 75.2% and 55.7% in 2017.
- The % of women in the legislature has fallen from 14% in 2006 to 11% in 2018 and the same in 2024.
- Over 52% of temporary election staff were youth under 35 years (more than 25% under 25 years).
- CVE activities supported by UNDP and CSO partners reached 3,592 communities across 15 counties and 48% of voters (45% female/55% male), including 84,077 first-time voters (49.3% female/50.7% male).
- Electoral complaints and violence compared to 2017 decreased; more isolated cases and 60 complaints filed.

⁶⁸ Liberia Diplo Watch Survey indicated that 33% of polling places visited were not accessible to PWD. ECC observers reported that 37% of polling places observed were not accessible to PWD.

⁶⁹ Recommendations of the EU EOM Liberia Report and LESP Annual Report 2023.

Finding 6. Inclusive and responsive decentralized service delivery.⁷⁰ UNDP continued to play an essential role in supporting decentralization and the expansion and improvement of services at subnational levels in favour of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Despite progress and gains, including legal and regulatory frameworks, challenges and drawbacks were evident around the institutional and political economy drivers, effective operationalization, and sustainability of services. Clear and realistic strategies and action plans were lacking to ensure institutional ownership, accountability, and the minimum resource allocation to maintain services and their quality in the long term.

The Liberia Decentralization Support Programme Phase 2 (LDSP II), the Joint Rule of Law Programme Phase 2, and the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative were part of UNDP's long-standing support to strengthen institutional capacities for the delivery of essential services at the subnational level through the County Service Centres (CSCs) and along the justice and security chains. UNDP continued to work closely with a wide range of ministries, agencies, and commissions; technical departments and units (with main partners being the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Ministry of Justice); legislative actors; security offices and officials; justice and judicial institutions and stakeholders; and specialized authorities (Revenue Authority, Land Authority), among others. The support ranged from the provision of resources and equipment; the development of systems, tools, and platforms (including digital solutions); to multi-sector capacity-building at different levels.

Bringing essential public services closer to the people: Decentralized service delivery

For the **decentralization agenda**, the LDSP II focused on supporting the effective transfer of authority and responsibilities from national to local governments, operationalizing the Local Government Act, citizens' participation and oversight, as well as the efficient and sustainable functioning of local government structures. The resources secured to implement an ambitious set of objectives amounted to nearly \$2.95 million (a funding deficit of 81 per cent), with contributions from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Irish Aid, and UNDP.⁷¹ The external evaluations conducted in both phases underscored the high relevance of efforts to progressively achieve decentralization, deconcentration, and devolution, with the CSCs being the cornerstone for ensuring equitable access to state services to all citizens. As part of a broader strategy to address exclusion and conflict drivers, UNDP's support for capacity-building and the establishment and operation of the CSCs in the country's 15 counties was widely acknowledged in interviews. A 'one-stop shop' approach brings government services closer to citizens, including access to civil registration documentation, tax payments, business registration, and social protection services. This is a relevant contribution to national development goals and the LNOB principle. More locally accessible and affordable services, especially for the most marginalized populations in remote areas and hard-to-reach counties (e.g., Southeast), was highlighted by interviewees as a critical need. In addition, the boost to county-level revenue generation through CSCs opened opportunities for locally driven resource planning, budgeting, and management through fiscal decentralization.

⁷⁰ Linked to Output 1.2: Capacities of government at subnational levels strengthened to promote inclusive decentralized service delivery including to marginalized and vulnerable groups; and Output 2.1: National and local justice systems enabled to ensure increased access to justice and security.

⁷¹ In comparison, LDSP I (2013–2019) was funded with over \$18 million. Source: Mid-Term Evaluation LDSP 2016. LDSP II was projected with a budget of \$15,460,760. The EU and USAID discontinued or shifted funding to other initiatives or partners after the closure of Phase I. Source: Project Document and Terminal Evaluation.

The transition from LDSP's Phase 1 to Phase 2 highlighted the risks linked to buy-in and sustainability, as resources for the operations of the CSCs were not secured by the ministries, agencies, and commissions.⁷² The change of the modality from national to direct implementation (NIM to DIM)⁷³ affected to a certain degree opportunities to further national ownership and capacity development within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Services available through different ministries/agencies gradually expanded to an average of 14, but more formally than effectively, as evidenced by interviews, visits to centres, and an independent assessment conducted in 2022.⁷⁴ Under LDSP I, CSCs managed to generate \$130,000 to \$240,000 on average per year, as a result of the extensive promotion and awareness-raising.⁷⁵ This decreased significantly after 2020 due to a progressive deterioration of services and facilities. According to interviewees, insufficient operational support, human resources, and oversight issues led to demotivation of personnel and ultimately to the closure of offices/service windows or significant inefficiencies in the delivery of services.⁷⁶

The CSCs' performance is well below their potential, leading to recentralization and discouragement of citizens to access services at the local level.⁷⁷ In terms of revenue generation, the location of the CSCs (in county capitals) does not necessarily support their full potential, as other urban areas in some counties with larger populations could generate greater demand for services. In this context, UNDP and donor funding remained crucial to sustain the process, ensuring minimum maintenance, such as electricity through solar panels and basic supplies, as well as capacity development and piloting of new services in a few counties (e.g., issuance of driver's licenses and real estate tax collection). The development and piloting of a digital citizens' feedback mechanism platform supported the objectives of enhanced social accountability of local service delivery and trust building. Its operationalization, however, showed weaknesses regarding referral and response protocols and awareness-raising. Considering the frustration about the availability, accessibility, and quality of services, opposite effects were generated, including mistrust and disinterest, according to interviewees in different counties.

Despite the alignment of the decentralization process with the Public Sector Reform Agenda, the Civil Service Reforms, and the government's national agenda, the evaluation revealed that the process remained challenged by some opposition to political decentralization and the effective deconcentration. The capacities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs as the lead entity were strengthened, but it still lacks the human resources and financial capacities to administer the CSCs effectively. Repeating the Phase I modality of embedding the project team within the institution could have possibly fostered more national ownership and capacity transfer. Regarding fiscal decentralization, there was not full clarity at the different levels and among the stakeholders interviewed on the paths to be followed for revenue sharing and devolution across counties. In this regard, a relevant pilot was supported to expand real estate tax collection, in collaboration with the Liberia Revenue Authority. In Margibi County, real estate taxes were collected through the Electronic Mass Automated Assessment System, which is an essential step for the boosting of national revenue generation and supporting the Revenue Sharing Act.

⁷² After its closure and up to the start of LDSP II, UNDP continued to provide resources and support, particularly to the CSCs. The funding allocation in the national budget in 2021 was \$600 per CSC and increased to \$13,333 in 2022. Source: Liberia Approved Budget 2022.

⁷³ Operational bottlenecks, fiduciary risks, and the results of an audit process were reasons for this shift, despite the interest and request of the Ministry of Interior Affairs to continue with NIM and/or a hybrid modality. Source: Interviews.

⁷⁴ There are not only differences in the number of services per CSC but also a drastic reduction in a two-months' timeframe, e.g., dropping from 22 or 27 services to 8 in Lofa and Margibi counties. Source: World Bank (2022), "Bringing Government Services Closer to Citizens: Baseline Assessment of Liberia's County Service Centers."

⁷⁵ According to UNDP estimates, CSCs across the country have provided services to over 800,000 persons and generating around \$3.76 million in local revenues between 2016 and 2020. Source: LDSP I Final Report.

⁷⁶ At the time of the evaluation, most of services were not processed on-site but in Monrovia for further processing and approval, including traditional marriage certificates. This causes long delays, imposes extra costs on citizens who must return later, and creates opportunities for corruption, according to assessment results. Source: World Bank 2022.

⁷⁷ Results from the 2021 SCORE survey indicated a national average score of 4 out of 10 for the performance of the CSCs. Scores were highest in Grand Bassa County (6.4) and Montserrado (4.8), and lowest in Western Liberia: Lofa (2), Gbarpolu (2.5), Grand Cape Mount (3), and Nimba County (2.6).

Even with the law's approval, the continuity and success of this process rely heavily on political commitment, the willingness to enforce regulatory frameworks, the establishment of necessary structures, and the allocation of adequate resources. Nevertheless, the resources invested by UNDP and the continuity over the two programming cycles led to key milestones and spurred progress, albeit somewhat scattered and still unsustainable.

Strengthening of local service delivery: Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services

UNDP's work at the subnational level focused on establishing and supporting integrated, rights-based, multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) as part of the EU-UN Spotlight initiative⁷⁸ and the Rule of Law workstream. This involved collaborating with line ministries, local police, authorities, specialized courts, social workers, health-care providers, CSOs/ CBOs, and traditional leaders, following a multi-pronged approach. Efforts included capacity development in SGBV preparedness, prevention, and response; developing the National Accountability Framework, referral pathways, and inter-institutional case management; raising public awareness; advocacy for GBV inclusion in development plans and budgets; and providing infrastructure, operational, and human resource support (e.g., Women and Children Protection Sections at police stations; Women, Child, and Social Protection departments in the CSCs; specialized courts; Justice and Confidence Centres). While the Spotlight initiative focused on six counties,⁷⁹ legal, psychosocial, and medical services were offered to SGBV survivors in all CSCs,⁸⁰ but were rarely requested. It was also evidenced that conditions of the office spaces do not provide an adequate, confidential, and protective environment.

The approaches and modalities applied for the development of capacity and accountability at the institutional, community, and individual levels varied across the target groups. These involved a variety of customized trainings, workshops, and multi-sector forums, including the integration of SGBV into the training curriculum of the Liberian National Police Academy; a 'train the trainers' modality; and community-based formats for mobilization, awareness-raising, and education on human rights, women's rights, SGBV, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Over 500 providers of SGBV services were strengthened in their capacities; and the CSOs, supported with UNDP through low value grants, reached some 62,400 people, with an estimate of 178,900 targeted through mass campaigns, according to reports.⁸¹

Interviews with institutions, CSOs, and participants highlighted the benefits of gained knowledge and skills for implementing SOPs, referral pathways, and coordinated survivor-centred assistance and case management. International best practices and sector-wide approaches were valued, but a more decentralized approach was needed at the subnational level, according to interviewees. Formal capacity-building strategies and effective M&E mechanisms to measure service quality improvements were lacking. Supported CSOs used varied approaches for awareness, advocacy, and legal assistance, with

⁷⁸ The initiative's total budget amounted to \$26.22 million, with UNDP managing a total of \$5.955 million (EU funding and contributions).

⁷⁹ Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Nimba, and Sinoe.

⁸⁰ Of the 15 CSCs, 11 offered these services through the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection.

⁸¹ Some 512 participants (226 female/286 male) – including members of the Liberia National Police and courts; Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP); Ministry of Health (MoH); Ministry of Education; Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism; CSOs; and traditional leaders – have been trained on how to respond to SGBV and harmful practices effectively by the MoH/SGBV Crimes Unit and MoGCSP. UNDP supported five CSOs that worked with a number of community-based groups for dissemination and support services in communities. Source: Liberia Spotlight Initiative Final Report and UNDP Annual Report 2022.

mixed levels of effectiveness due to the scope and short timeframe of activities. Community-based work and structures, such as community-based support services, SGBV action plans, and protection committees, rely heavily on international funding to be continued.

Support for infrastructure, equipment, vehicles, and other assets was deemed essential but insufficient in light of the needs. UNDP's support helped to establish two Specialized Criminal Courts "E"⁸² in Bong and Nimba counties, six 'One-Stop' service centres for integrated victim support services,⁸³ as well as 11 Justice and Confidence Centres under the joint government programme.⁸⁴ Fieldwork revealed that many infrastructures and units deteriorated due to the lack of funding. Nonetheless, this type of support was in high demand, and even more so was the provision of consumables (e.g., office supplies and fuel) for basic functioning. The Women and Children's Protection Sections⁸⁵ visited faced serious challenges in effective case management and investigation due to resource shortages (e.g., transportation and the lack of stationary to register cases), thus affecting investigations by the SGBV Crimes Units, court proceedings, and ultimately leading to the dismissal of cases. Similarly, the 'One-Stop' centres struggled with a lack of dedicated and certified personnel, the availability and maintenance of safe houses, and resources for survivors to reach these centres.

Overall, UNDP's support remained in line with the UNMIL legacy. It contributed to the roll-out of the Integrated Essential Service Package, which was recognized as useful by the interviewees, but evidenced a considerable level of unsustainability. There was progress in statistical capacity, harmonized SGBV data collection,⁸⁶ and coordination among relevant institutions, which is essential for evidence-based decision-making and programming. Specialized SGBV courts and harmonized proceedings, supported by UNDP, expedited trials, improved access to justice, and contributed to some level of community confidence in the police and judiciary. However, the formal justice system remains underutilized for SGBV cases, compared to informal mechanisms. Other issues identified included barriers linked to reporting, stigmatization, time, and the cost for trials. The low caseload received, high dismissal or acquittal rates,⁸⁷ and lengthy trials indicate the need for systemic reforms and alternative pathways, including community-led processes. Greater consultation with target communities could enhance proposals for sustainable community-based service delivery and emphasize informal justice avenues for SGBV survivors.

Finding 7. Increased access to justice and security.⁸⁸ UNDP's contributions to the strengthening of the formal justice system and security institutions continued to be recognized – this despite key sectoral indicators and public confidence in the judiciary showing limited progress over the years, along with weak public accountability. This long-standing support by UNDP, as a legacy of the UNMIL transition, continued to be critical. The significant decline in funding for rule of law work in Liberia required a major strategic reorientation, adaptation, and more innovative approaches. More attention needed to be given to informal and traditional justice systems and locally driven dispute resolution, particularly around key drivers of conflict, such as land disputes and concessions, and linkages to environmental and climate justice.

⁸² A special court designated to deal exclusively with sexual offenses.

⁸³ These services included psychosocial support, counselling, referrals, family planning, and survivor services (case management, counselling, access to justice, and economic empowerment).

⁸⁴ These Justice and Confidence Centres established in the six counties (Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Nimba and Sinoe) seek to provide legal aid services, psychosocial support, Assessment of Development Reports, and community awareness and education on GBV and human rights for communities and SGBV survivors. Source: Joint RoL Programme Final Report 2023.

⁸⁵ According to the LSI Final Report, Women and Children Protection Sections Units in Liberia were able to receive 1,356 cases, including 677 (49.9%) sexual cases (rape and gang rape), and 469 (34.5%) cases of domestic violence.

⁸⁶ The data collection strategy is led by the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MGCSP). National quarterly reports are produced consolidating GBV data reported by Gender coordinators at the county level and by the MGCSP, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Health.

⁸⁷ Cases still take up to two years to come to trial, with relatively high rates of acquittal reported (75%), largely due to lack of prosecution. The Specialized Court E in Bong disposed of 8 cases out of 57 by 2021; the Specialized Court E in Nimba County disposed of 31 cases out of 62; and Monrovia received 2,261 cases and disposed of 865 between 2009 and 2022. Source: World Bank (2003), "Improving Justice in Liberia: A 2023 JUPITER Assessment."

⁸⁸ CPD Output 2.1: National and local justice systems enabled to ensure increased access to justice and security.

During this cycle, despite the sizeable underfunding, UNDP largely maintained the types of access to justice and rule of law activities from previous cycles. The desk study and interviews showed that, despite the levels of investment over the past 20 years, systemic change remains diluted due to such issues as corruption, budget constraints, geographic remoteness, and centralized services. Recent studies have highlighted the so-called ‘capacity trap’ in security and justice institutions. This includes unrealistic ambitions and expectations on the scale, pace, and effectiveness of changes in policy, legal and institutional frameworks, and the appropriateness of approaches in their contextual and resource applicability.⁸⁹

Accessibility and efficiency of a strengthened justice system and alternative dispute resolution

Through the Joint Rule of Law (RoL) Programme Phase II,⁹⁰ UNDP continued to focus on the formal justice system, with emphasis on establishing presence and extending state justice and security services. The programme was significantly underfunded, with \$4.2 million out of the forecasted \$11.9 million. UNDP provided over 76 per cent of the funds, with an additional 3 per cent from Irish Aid.⁹¹ The large-scale, sector-wide programme posed risks related to national counterparts’ expectations towards UNDP to maintain UNMIL support levels, but also in terms of absorptive capacity, scalability, and sustainability. National revenues and budget allocations for the security and RoL sector have declined since 2015, primarily covering recurrent expenses.⁹² Additionally, past issues surrounding UNDP’s administration of the Justice and Security Trust Fund (2009–2021)⁹³ and concerns over progress, performance, and corruption appeared to have jeopardized future international funding for Liberia’s RoL sector.⁹⁴

In this context, UNDP maintained a supply-driven focus on justice, emphasizing institutional/operational support and criminal law issues, to the detriment of advancing a more comprehensive ‘sector-wide’ approach that included accountability and citizen oversight as originally planned. Civil case management and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms at the community-level received less attention, despite their importance in terms of volume of civil disputes. In Liberia, as in many sub-Saharan African countries, traditional, customary, and informal justice providers are the primary and preferred way to solve disputes and are perceived as more efficient and effective than the courts.⁹⁵ Despite the coexistence of the formal and customary system, the judiciary boundaries remain unclear within Liberia’s existing legal frameworks. While customary decisions enjoy high levels of enforcement and community acceptance, they tend to be discriminatory and less favourable to women.⁹⁶

On a positive note, in this CPD the resolution of land disputes gained greater prominence as a driver of conflict through the Strengthening Land Governance and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms project.⁹⁷ The final evaluation of the RoL programme and the stakeholders interviewed highlighted the relevance of

⁸⁹ International Development Law Organization (2022), “Rule of Law and access to justice in Liberia;” World Bank Group (2023), “Improving Justice in Liberia: A 2023 JUPITER.”

⁹⁰ UNDP, OHCHR, UN Women, and UNICEF.

⁹¹ Compared with the Joint UNDP/UNMIL Rule of Law Project (2016–2019) that was estimated at \$16.8 million, \$10.3 million was ultimately mobilized and 96% was executed. Funding for Phase II is covered by TRAC 1 and TRAC 2 funds. Source: UNDP financial reports and RoL Phase II PRODOC.

⁹² For example, for 2023: Total planned expenditure of \$783 million, with recurrent expenditure of \$635 million (81%), including debt servicing of \$99 million, and public sector investment plans of \$148 million (19%). Security & RoL Sector budget: \$100.18 million, \$95.68 million recurrent expenditures, and \$4.5 for the public sector investment plan focused on transparency and accountability. Source: Liberia 2023 Approved Budget.

⁹³ The Justice and Security Trust Fund (JSTF) was established as a flexible mechanism to fund justice and security initiatives in Liberia. UNDP acted as the fund manager (administrative agent) and as an implementer. The JSTF received funding from SIDA and UNDP.

⁹⁴ The EU and SIDA shifted their funding towards other implementation modalities and partners, including the International Development Law Organization.

⁹⁵ The customary system is dominant in counties in the Hinterland with the least number of courts per inhabitants (i.e., Nimba, Lofa, Bong, Maryland). Source: World Bank (2023), JUPITER Assessment.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Joint project implemented with UN Women and WFP with a total budget amounting to \$3,996,522 (UNDP managing \$1,043,557).

the work around ADR, supported especially by UNDP from the policy and institutional perspective (i.e., strengthening of the Ministry of Justice ADR Unit) and capacity-building for effective implementation and compliance with constitutional rights.

Among the key achievements, highlighted in interviews and reports, were the continued professionalization of the judiciary through different training programmes, the deployment of magistrates and judicial officers to counties, and the establishment of a digital Judicial Case Management Information System⁹⁸ for case tracking in partnership with the Judiciary, Ministry of Justice, and Directorate of Public Prosecution, as well as the expansion of the Crime Statistics Information System database through a pilot in five counties. The transition to digital systems and improved data collection and processing are acknowledged as vital in assisting the security and justice chain to systematically catalogue cases and use the information swiftly. The increase in access to justices was measured by the RoL programme based on the number of cases adjudicated to courts in the counties and cases resolved through mobile courts.⁹⁹ Although progress was made in case management, the slow processing of cases maintains the judicial backlog, as well as prison overcrowding.

Between 2018 and 2022 the Magistrate Courts caseload rose significantly (3,863 to 5,575), while clearance rates deteriorated and disposition time increased. Circuit and Specialized Courts saw slight improvements, but Circuit Courts showed (600 days average disposition time).¹⁰⁰ The end of UNMIL support reduced the number of prosecutors and other key officials per county, leading to delays and case abandonment, and undermining confidence in the system and efforts to build a fair, people-centred justice system.

Since 2007, Liberia's prison population has nearly tripled, with severe overcrowding and 73 per cent being pre-trial detainees. The Monrovia Central Prison houses over three times its capacity.¹⁰¹ While UNDP's support to the Bureau of Correction and Rehabilitation helped to improve planning processes and prison conditions, along with remedial interventions during the pandemic, international standards remained unmet. Increased detention rates are likely linked to greater use of the formal justice system and more punitive sentences for minor offenses. The programme's focus on quality, fairness, and oversight of judgments was limited.

There is a need to continue advocating and promoting measures for case resolution and alternatives to detention, such as revised crime thresholds and conditions for early release, as part of an overall shift in focus and approaches more adapted to the Liberian context.¹⁰² Despite its potential to address prison overcrowding, the introduction of plea-bargaining, which was supported by UNDP, carries risks in Liberia's judicial system. Considering the outlined shortcomings in the system, plea bargaining is insufficiently robust to guarantee the rights of defendants, provide public defenders, and maintain adequate controls to prevent abuse and corruption.¹⁰³

The legal aid approach, implemented through CSO partnerships and small grants, along with the Justice and Confidence Centres aimed to improve access to justice for women, marginalized groups, inmates, and other minorities. Despite recognition from stakeholders and investments in gender-sensitive training

⁹⁸ UNDP support included IT equipment, Internet subscriptions, and the training. The GoL requested UNDP support to fully operationalize the system at central and subnational levels. However, funding was not mobilized to this extent.

⁹⁹ The number of criminal and civil cases adjudicated by Court E, Magisterial, and Circuit Courts (indicator 1.1.1) increased from 252 in 2020 to 16,999 in 2023; and the number of cases resolved through the mobile courts (indicator 1.1.2) increased from 0 in 2020 to 1,254 in 2023. Source: Joint RoL Programme Final Evaluation (2024).

¹⁰⁰ World Bank (2023), "JUPITER Assessment, reference to Judiciary of the Republic of Liberia, 2018–2023; Annual and Quarterly Reports of the Judiciary," p. 57.

¹⁰¹ Liberia's prisons have a combined official capacity of 1,351, resulting in overcrowding at 269%. Source: UNDP Liberia Issue Brief (Dec. 2022), "Prisons Overcrowding in Liberia" and Joint RoL Programme Final Evaluation (2024).

¹⁰² The final evaluation of the Justice and Security Trust Fund conducted in 2021 recommended the shift from the infrastructure focused approach to addressing root causes of crime and judicial reforms, complemented by mobile courts.

¹⁰³ Gligbe and Williams (2019), Independent Outcome Evaluation, UNDP/UN Women Project, "Strengthening the Rule of Law in Liberia: Addressing Pre-Trial detention and Rolling Out Community Policing." On the other hand, the final evaluation of the joint RoL Programme (December 2023) did not report on any progress linked to the implementation of the law.

for personnel of the justice and security chains, sustainable results were hindered by inadequate funding and lack of multi-year support for CSOs.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, performance and client satisfaction were not adequately measured, and key legal issues linked to civil cases and disputes, including for women (e.g., child support and marital abandonment), were mainly overlooked in the approach. Opportunities exist to explore paralegal programming and involve the replaced untrained magistrates from local communities, which could be more cost-effective and scalable, as seen in UNDP's work in Sierra Leone and Malawi.¹⁰⁵

Trust building through effective delivery of essential security and protection services

UNDP continued to support the professionalization of the Liberia National Police and Liberia Immigration Services at the central level and the training for officers deployed in the counties. Addressing abuse of power and corruption to build trust remained critical. Resource constraints led efforts to concentrate on specialized and gender-sensitive service delivery, as mentioned. Measuring performance and quality based on improved knowledge and skills remains challenging due to numerous obstacles officers face in their duties, as noted in interviews and field visits. Security, migration, and judiciary personnel deployed to or serving in highly remote areas are particularly disincentivized due to structural issues, insufficient resources, and a poor work environment. This contrasted with the notion of integrity and trustworthy professional services promoted through the programme. The perception of corruption remained high and that of insecurity increased, which seemed not to be mitigated by the presence of police or their professionalization.¹⁰⁶

Some alternative approaches supported by UNDP in the past, such as community policing to reduce incidence and to report cases of SGBV, were not expanded or furthered due to limited resources. Some of these community structures and neighbourhood watch groups continued to operate and engage in electoral security work during this cycle and in the resolution of minor disputes. Interviewees recognized the positive effects of collaboration between communities and local police, which contributes to greater trust and perception of public security.

Moreover, the evaluation revealed that previous flagship investments in infrastructures and operational support through the Justice and Security Trust Fund, such as the creation and piloting of Regional Justice and Security Centres¹⁰⁷ to fill service proximity gaps and support decentralization, could not be sustained. Field visits evidenced deteriorated conditions, with nearly abandoned or no longer functioning services. This underscores that, by supporting the deployment of weak institutions in rural areas and stimulating demand through outreach and awareness sessions, UNDP and national counterparts took risks that ultimately led to the opposite effects. The institutions were and remain unable to meet set standards, deliver or sustain these services over the long term, and generate trust in the people they serve.

Overall, UNDP's heavy reliance on TRAC resources and trust funds, such as the Peacebuilding Fund, resulted in insufficient resources to meet the proposed programme priorities and CPD targets. While there were some incremental gains in components of the workstream, the limited improvements at the outcome level

¹⁰⁴ The seven CSOs reached a total of 8,772 persons, composed of 4,582 men and 4,188 women. The CSOs also provided legal aid services to 54 survivors of GBV and 101 inmates. Source: Joint RoL Programme Final Evaluation (2024).

¹⁰⁵ UNDP IEO (2023), thematic evaluation "Access to Justice."

¹⁰⁶ Only 20% of citizens indicated that the police "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights. Among citizens who asked for help from the police in the past year, 55% indicated that it was difficult to get the assistance needed, and 78% said they had to pay a bribe. Source: Afrobarometer, "Liberians cite corruption, lack of professionalism as police failings," Dispatch No. 632 (18 April 2023).

¹⁰⁷ The Regional Hubs programme was established by UNMIL and subsequently supported by UNDP/UNCT. In the previous cycle UNDP supported the Hub in Gbarnga and intended the roll-out in Harper and Zwedru, aimed at delivering integrated justice and security services from 14 units along the justice and security chains.

required reconsideration of the fundamental approaches. The dispersion of resources and support among key government partners and stakeholders led to fragmentation, limiting the potential for systemic change and likely benefiting communities and citizens less than intended.

Finding 8. Reconciliation, peacebuilding, and social cohesion.¹⁰⁸ UNDP's work on peacebuilding and social cohesion remained relevant. The support and contributions in land governance and dispute resolution were particularly important and were well-conceived, addressing key drivers of local conflicts, barriers to development, and women and youth participation. In light of the sensitivity of issues, the implementation of initiatives on the ground was rather scattered and constrained by time and resources. This left the processes somewhat incomplete and limited their transformative potential, while the further integration and cross-fertilization interventions under Outcome 3 remained untapped.

In line with UNMIL's transition commitments, UNDP continued to implement joint initiatives with the UNCT to deliver peace dividends to all Liberians and to support the Liberian Peacebuilding Office, along with other relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. Reconciliation is part of a larger, outstanding historical issue in Liberia that remained largely unaddressed and contested during this cycle. Progress on the recommendations of the 2009 Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission continued to be limited or overlooked, such as the creation of a war crimes tribunal.¹⁰⁹ Hence, alternative strategies to foster reconciliation and social cohesion were needed, given the demands from human rights groups and the affected population.

To address the broader context of fragile national unity, the UNCT initiatives implemented and most recently launched in 2023 followed a multi-pronged approach. In addition to supporting the Palava Hut process and the construction of memorials, actions were aimed at strengthening livelihoods, facilitating dialogue among more than 50 conflict-prone communities, and promoting spaces for participation and peaceful dispute resolution. The Palava Hut programme,¹¹⁰ launched in 2016, continued to be supported by UNDP in partnership with the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, along with the construction of four memorials on mass graves and massacre sites. During this cycle hearings in Bong, Grand Gedeh, and Rivercess counties were conducted.¹¹¹ Interviews and field visits allowed recognition of their value as spaces for truth-telling, healing, and reconciliation among community members. All stakeholders stressed the demand and the need to expand them both in time (due to the sensitivity of the process) and geographically. Notably, UNDP actively promoted women's inclusion and gender equality in the Palava Hut Committee (PHC) and district Palava Hut Hearing Committees, with a female clan chief leading the PHC, marking a paradigm shift.

Similarly, through the support for land governance issues, in collaboration with the Liberia Land Authority, women's and youth participation were actively boosted in boundary mapping exercises and local land governance and dispute resolution structures in four conflict-prone counties (Grand Cape Mount, Maryland, Nimba, and Sinoe). Interviews and field visits evidenced the significance of these efforts. Joint initiatives with UN Women, WFP, and FAO addressed land governance, long-lasting inter- and intra-community tensions, and barriers to development, advancing the Land Rights Act and Local Government Act. Key achievements

¹⁰⁸ CPD Output 2.2: Reconciliation and peacebuilding mechanisms expanded and integrated into the governance structure at national and subnational levels, with equal participation of women.

¹⁰⁹ The recommendations included a reparation programme, the establishment of an extraordinary criminal tribunal, domestic prosecution, public sanctions, and the roll-out of a national palaver hut programme, among others. Source: Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2009), "Final Report. Volume 1: Findings and Determinations."

¹¹⁰ This model is based on age-old tradition to settle disputes, whereby victims and alleged perpetrators are given the space for truth telling as a means to establish a common ground for peace and reconciliation. The programme is restricted to violations classified as "lesser in gravity" such as arson, assault, forced displacement, forced labour, looting, destruction and theft of properties, and desecration of sacred places.

¹¹¹ Since 2016 and to date, 328 hearings in five of the 15 counties were conducted, involving 289 perpetrators and 372 victims. Source: UNDP Liberia Annual Report 2022.

included issuing the first legally recognized communal land title, participatory boundary demarcation in over 40 communities, and resolving conflicts between communities and companies over mining and farming concessions (including payment agreements). These efforts were seen as catalytic for processes in other communities, supported through independent NGOs to achieve recognition of communal lands. While transformative changes take time in Liberia's society, women's inclusion in land ownership and adjudication matters are notable efforts to raise awareness and position the issues on the public agenda.

Moreover, since the previous cycle UNDP, in partnership with UN IOM and the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission, supported peaceful relations across border communities in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. This involved confidence-building measures between authorities and communities on both sides, joint border patrols, the establishment of prevention and peace committees, along with livelihood support. The evaluation revealed that cross-border work was particularly relevant during the pandemic, but overall showed modest results. Design issues and limited needs assessments, including consultation processes with the target groups (e.g., cross-border women traders), as well as duplication of efforts with other initiatives, were highlighted. Likewise, given that projects such as the Peacebuilding Fund's 'Peace Dividends in Liberia' and the Liberia Multi-Stakeholder Trust Fund's 'Sustaining Peace and Reconciliation through Strengthening Land Governance' addressed and integrated components related to CPD Outcome 3, the evaluation found rather limited cross-fertilization in implementation, or in the alignment of strategies and approaches. The relevance of activities to promote peace, social cohesion, and reconciliation was recognized, particularly creating spaces for dialogue and social activities (including infrastructures), as well as opportunities for income generation. Nevertheless, most livelihood activities within these initiatives were spread among a small number of beneficiaries, following a quick impact approach with limited transformational value in addressing the root causes of conflict factors.

Mainstreaming energy and environment and inclusive green growth – linked to CPD Outcome 3

Finding 9. Enabling environment and system strengthening.¹¹² UNDP was a key contributor to Liberia's growing focus on climate change and environmental protection, positioning and advancing the agenda and the revised National Determined Contributions and Action Plans. Conditions and commitment for effective implementation of systems and plans, including disaster risk management capacities at central and subnational levels, were still not fully secured. The country office had difficulties in finding entry points for meaningful engagement with the private sector in general, and particularly extractive sectors to ensure adequate safeguards and equitable benefit-sharing for communities located in natural resource and protected areas.

In this cycle, UNDP adopted a more integrated approach compared to previous efforts focused on employment growth through micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and regulatory frameworks. In line with the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development objective to stimulate private sector-driven growth in Liberia's key sectors (agriculture, fishery, forestry, and extractives), the focus shifted to natural resource governance and the local communities' share of benefits, particularly for women and youth. Hence, the Outcome 3 portfolio addressed more coherently the interrelation of poverty reduction, resilience, environment, and climate change.¹¹³ For the policy and regulatory environment, this

¹¹² CDP Output 3.1: Systems strengthened to enable implementation of gender-sensitive and risk-informed prevention and preparedness to limit the impact of natural hazards and climate change and promote peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

¹¹³ The outcome aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, and 15 and UNDP Strategic Plan signature solutions (poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, energy and gender equality). Under Signature Solution One, "Keeping people out of poverty," UNDP implemented the Livelihoods and Employment Creation in Liberia project. Under Signature Solution Three, "Crisis prevention and increased resilience," UNDP launched Monrovia Metropolitan Climate Resilience project. Under Signature Solution Five, "Clean Affordable Energy," UNDP implemented the Energy and Environment Programme.

involved mainstreaming gender-sensitive, environmental considerations into national and sectoral policies and integrated multi-sectoral planning to drive the green growth strategy. This strategic shift, apart from supporting national priorities and international commitments, was largely driven by the potential for resource mobilization, including domestic revenue generation through green assets (particularly forests) and new financing mechanisms (i.e., carbon finance). UNDP's support to strengthen policy, legal, and institutional frameworks covered the following areas:

- **Climate promise and actions.** In close partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency, UNDP contributed to policy advocacy and the strengthening of targeted national systems aimed at reducing the impact of natural hazards and climate change, which allowed the country to make strides. Through the UNDP Climate Promise, support was channelled into whole-of-government/-society consultations (particularly focused on women, youth, and the private sector). This led to the revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the development of a financing strategy. To inform plans and strategies in different sectors, gender-responsive climate vulnerability risk assessments were conducted, in collaboration with national experts from government institutions and academia, in priority sectors including coastal zones, health, agriculture, waste management, and forestry. Notably, Liberia committed to integrating climate action, capacity-building, climate finance, and gender and youth issues into all sectoral activities by 2025. Gender-responsive measures were also included in the adaptation framework in the agriculture and fisheries sector and cross-sectoral strategies.¹¹⁴ UNDP's years of technical and advisory support resulted in the abridged version of Liberia's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and a draft amendment proposal to the Environment Protection Law, aiming to harmonize the mandates of key climate change institutions.¹¹⁵ The revised NDCs and the comprehensiveness of the NAP in terms of sector coverage were widely recognized by interviewed stakeholders. Yet, their implementation and that of associated sectoral action plans face significant challenges, particularly a climate finance gap of \$51.3 million per year, along with technical capacities and political economy factors.¹¹⁶ The creation of the Liberia Private Sector Climate Alliance, a platform to promote public-private partnerships and dialogue to address the impacts of climate change and to seek sustainable solutions, has so far not materialized into significant private sector investments.
- **Disaster risk reduction.** Building on the work of the previous cycle, UNDP supported the National Disaster Management Agency in developing and operationalizing the country's first National Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Resilience Strategy (2020–2030) through the establishment of DRR coordination mechanisms/platform, different coastal erosion hazard vulnerability assessments, and mapping exercises to inform the development of environmental action plans for several counties. The latter also aimed at supporting the decentralization of the National Early Warning and Emergency Operation Centre through the establishment of three regional offices (Bong, Bomi, and the Southeast) and the training of staff in disaster management committees.¹¹⁷ However, these efforts were hampered by limited government financial support for the operation of these regional offices.

¹¹⁴ Liberia has a National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change. In partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, the Action Plan is a tool to mainstream gender into climate change in the budgeting process, which was first implemented for the National Budget 2021.

¹¹⁵ The bill was drafted and submitted to the legislature for deliberation. Submission to the legislature for enactment was scheduled for early 2023, but was still not enforced at the time of this evaluation. Source: Results-Oriented Annual Report (ROAR), 2021–2023.

¹¹⁶ Three out of the planned five targeted systems for the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) were met. The revised NDC requires \$490.5 million to meet its goals by 2025. The average total climate finance flow to Liberia between 2019 and 2022 was \$112 million (comprised of 84% public sources and 16% private funds). Source: African Development Bank Group, "Liberia Country Focus Report 2023."

¹¹⁷ The first decentralized disaster management regional hub in Gbarnga, Bong county, was established in 2022 to support County Disaster Management Committees. The hub was not functional at the time of this evaluation due to staffing issues as the government could not pay salaries. Source: Interview with the Disaster Risk Management Director for the Risk and Early Warning Unit.

Advances in policies and strategies were seen as valuable by the responsible stakeholders, but undermined by inadequate national budget support. Capacity-building, supporting champions in the key institutions, and raising public awareness as well as multi-stakeholder dialogues were key efforts by UNDP to maintain the topics on the political agenda. A significant achievement was the creation of graduate and Master's programmes in environmental studies and climate change at the University of Liberia, representing a long-term investment in capacity development. Another notable development, although not currently operational, was the Climate Change Knowledge Sharing Digital Platform, developed to enhance data generation and synchronize disaster and climate information through inter-agency collaboration. Reports and interviews stressed its use and usefulness for technicians, policy makers, researchers, and students, with over 30,000 users. Despite its benefits, however, the platform lacked a sustainability plan or a business model for service payments, and issues with hosting transfers, cost coverage, and database upgrades ultimately halted its operation.¹¹⁸ Similarly, despite building a pool of national experts, institutionalizing these capacities in government departments continued to be hindered by limited resources, low staff retention, and political changes.

Other sectoral policies and institutional support envisaged in the CPD related to the tourism sector, specifically ecotourism development, biodiversity protection, and strengthening the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector.¹¹⁹ Driven by specific requests, UNDP support to relevant government institutions through multi-stakeholder engagements led to the draft National Tourism Policy, a draft 2010 National Investment Incentive Code for tourism, and the establishment of the Liberia Tourism Board. For the artisanal mining sector, 15 multi-stakeholder platforms in concession areas were convened, which facilitated dialogue, and UNDP supported the elaboration and dissemination of a user-friendly ASM manual on regulations, standards, and practical steps for environmentally safe and sustainable mining and the rights of artisanal miners. Additionally, UNDP contributed, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, to the development of the National Oil Palm Strategy and Action Plan, and assisted the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia¹²⁰ in designing a Private Sector Strategy. This support was viewed as a vehicle for the successful mobilization of private sector funding to support Liberia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets in the future.

While overall the upstream support and contributions were seen as useful and valuable by the involved institutions, these actions appeared not to have yielded significant results to date, particularly in terms of improvements in livelihoods and development in communities dependent on the mentioned sectors. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of clear strategies driving these efforts forward in the future.

Finding 10. Resilience and community-led development.¹²¹ UNDP Liberia supported different pilot initiatives to address key NAP objectives and the resilience of vulnerable communities. Among these, the coastal protection intervention was the most successful in terms of scaling up and contributing to mitigation, as well as change and ownership processes. UNDP's approach to engaging the private

¹¹⁸ At the time of this evaluation, there were efforts to collect and feed data and information from various institutions into the platform, but the external hosting company did not hand over the editing rights to the National Disaster Management Agency. Although UNDP paid for another year of the hosting, with an estimated cost of \$16,000/year, there was no clarity about cost sharing. However, there were plans to reactive it to at least recover the data base.

¹¹⁹ CPD Output 3.2: Policies, institutions and programmes strengthened, and solutions adopted, to address conservation, sustainable use, ecotourism, and equitable benefit-sharing of natural resources and conflict prevention.

¹²⁰ The Platform is a national forum where issues on sustainable oil palm production are discussed, including policies and action plans on sustainable oil palm production. The stakeholders include the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry Development Authority, Conservation International, CSOs, private sector representatives, and smallholder associations.

¹²¹ CPD Output 3.2: Policies, institutions, and programmes strengthened, and solutions adopted, to address conservation, sustainable use, ecotourism, and equitable benefit-sharing of natural resources and conflict prevention.

sector in natural resource management and climate change action through win-win agreements yielded some results, albeit limited in generating significant contributions to NDC/NAP targets and their potential for scaling up.

UNDP supported a diverse portfolio of climate change and resilience initiatives that varied in scale, level of articulation between up and downstream, as well as ownership at national and local levels. These initiatives aimed at contributing to the implementation of the NAP and Liberia's climate commitment across sectors, such as agriculture, energy, coastal zones, fisheries, forestry, and waste management. The coastal protection interventions stood out, addressing a priority area and urgent need to prevent and reduce the impact of erosion along the 680 km of coastline and its impact on the livelihoods of fishing communities. Initiated with a pilot project during the previous cycle in New Kru Town (Montserrado County),¹²² UNDP, in partnership with the Ministry of Mines and Energy and in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency, successfully developed and scaled up the initiative. For coastal protection, improved resilience of affected communities, and climate change adaptation actions in the Metropolitan Monrovia area and Sinoe County, an additional \$46 million was mobilized through the Global Environmental Facility and Green Climate Fund. Still in the early stages of implementation, interviews highlighted their relevance in terms of scope (i.e., 10,500 people in West Point/Montserrado County and 80,000 people in the coastal communities of Sinoe) and the anticipated positive impact on livelihoods, assets (e.g., communal property), and entire ecosystems.

The desk study and interviews revealed key aspects and good practices in terms of strategy and approach, such as: (i) adaptive learning that informed scaling up, as well as strategic and technical decisions;¹²³ (ii) strengthened use of data and comprehensive technical assessments;¹²⁴ (iii) assisted national implementation for the training of national experts through joint teams with international experts and UNDP to enhance technical assistance; and (iv) fostered engagement of community groups and local institutional mechanisms for meaningful participation throughout the process to ensure social cohesion, ownership, and multiplier effects. Despite challenges such as implementation delays and securing government financial contributions,¹²⁵ stakeholders agreed that the adaptive collaborative management approach and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms were effective in identifying and addressing bottlenecks and barriers.

To strengthen environmental conservation, sustainable land use, forest governance, and the resilience of livelihoods of forest-dependent communities, in 2022 UNDP, in collaboration with FAO and partnership with Liberia's Forestry Development Authority, launched the Community-Based Forestry and Protected Area Management project. Targeting 20 communities in seven counties, the project trained and equipped 80 local 'eco-guards' (34 women/46 men) for forest protection and management.¹²⁶ Support and activities to date ranged from high-level dialogues on forest governance and carbon finance, assessments for alternative livelihoods in protected areas, awareness-raising, training, capacity-building for institutions and communities, and strengthening local governance structures. Moreover, two modalities incentivized environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and climate change actions: Youth Eco-Brigades with individual business start-up grants (\$400); and small grant schemes for farmers in protected areas, with 80 per cent of beneficiaries being women farmers.

¹²² Project 'Enhancing Resilience of Liberia Montserrado County Vulnerable Coastal Area to Climate Change Risks' (2018–2019), funded by the Global Environmental Facility with \$2 million.

¹²³ Based on lessons learned, the projects adopted an integrated approach that combines nature-based interventions; hard infrastructure; gender-responsive approaches; capacity development, policy, and knowledge management; and information and observational management systems. Source: Pro Docs.

¹²⁴ The Monrovia Metropolitan Climate Resilience Project informed its design and implementation plans through an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, the Monitoring of Social and Environmental Safeguards, the Hydro-Engineering Study, and detailed technical designs, as well as the project's impact evaluation framework.

¹²⁵ As per the funding agreement, the disbursement of donor funds is linked to the reception of government co-financing, which has been slow and delayed due to the election process. Source: Interviews and UNDP ROAR, 2023.

¹²⁶ UNDP Liberia ROAR, 2023.

It was positively noted in interviews that ‘eco-guards’ and eco-brigades were selected through a participatory approach and fostering gender equality (which proved more difficult in the forest-fringed communities). Despite a modest number of beneficiaries, smart agriculture activities supported the livelihoods of 160 smallholder rice farmers (110 women/50 men) organized in three cooperatives. The Eco-Brigades initiative helped reduce illegal hunting and raise community awareness of the importance of preserving biodiversity (including in the Gole National Park and Foye Protected Area in Lofa). The brigades engaged in community cleaning and awareness activities, with over 98 per cent of members generating income and joining savings groups.¹²⁷ Compared to other livelihoods initiatives (e.g., Growth Accelerator), no additional training or follow-up on business development was provided, and all remained informal. The evaluation found that although the initiative generated significant interest and commitment among young people, its expansion and institutionalization as part of the decentralization process have not materialized, posing a sustainability risk. In addition, it was noted that cross-fertilization with the work on land governance and ADR was not seized effectively.

Access to renewable energy was a priority in the CPD and the inclusive green growth portfolio (i.e., energy and environment programme), addressing Liberia’s low electricity coverage, which constrains livelihoods and burdens forests.¹²⁸ Funding limitations restricted broader implementation of piloted initiatives. The Solar for Health pilot was launched in 2020, supporting 12 health facilities in seven counties with solar energy. This, in turn, led to a larger-scale proposal to the Green Climate Fund aiming to provide clean solar energy to 300 rural health-care facilities, with a budget of approximately \$35 million. Solar energy grids were also installed in the CSCs, police stations, and border posts. Other small-scale initiatives included providing solar freezers, dryers, and energy-efficient ovens to support fishing communities in Robertsport, Marshall, and New Kru Town. Interviews and field visits revealed that, although these efforts were positively received by beneficiaries, highlighting improvements in processing time and sales of fresh and dried fish,¹²⁹ some equipment became non-operational within a year due to installation and maintenance issues. Larger projects by FAO and a planned World Bank initiative to professionalize the fisheries sector indicated that UNDP’s added value was less evident in this type of small-scale and ad hoc implementation compared to its contributions at the policy level. Another supported initiative that secured private sector engagement for natural resources management was the roll-out of eco-stove production units in seven counties, linking and training 130 women in partnership with Green Gold Liberia.¹³⁰ While the evaluation identified potential for future scale-up and employment opportunities, significant investment in awareness-raising and marketing would be required to achieve large-scale economic growth and environmental impact. Sales to date (up to 200 stoves in some counties) highlighted the challenges of adopting this technology, along with understanding the environmental benefits and economic savings for households.

Within the waste management sector, UNDP also played an integrator role in fostering private sector engagement, investments, and innovation challenges for entrepreneurs, which to date yielded mixed results, but some potential for scaling up. Following an assessment on investment potential, a Multi-stakeholders’ Waste Resource Recovery Platform was established to connect key stakeholders in the waste management value chain to promote waste recovery. Yet, to date, limited or no progress was reported on recommendations of the assessment or joint actions. Fourteen local

¹²⁷ Initially launched in Grand Cape Mount County, and expanded to Grand Bassa, Sinoe, and Lofa, 240 vulnerable and economically marginalized youth were targeted. While intended to support green business opportunities, the youth invested in businesses such as motorcycle taxi, resale (e.g., telecommunications, fuel, clothing), and, to a lesser extent, agricultural activities.

¹²⁸ Liberia electricity access is extremely limited, reaching only 29.8% of the total population and being almost absent in rural areas, according to International Energy Agency data from 2019 and World Bank data from 2021, which is one of the lowest electrification rates in the world.

¹²⁹ Solar dryers and freezers helped the female traders raise their profits by \$780, and sales of five businesses to more than \$25,500. Source: UNDP Liberia ROAR, 2022.

¹³⁰ The targeted counties are Gbapolu, Montserrado, Cape Mount, Bomi, Margibi, Bong and Grand Bassa. This initiative supports the effort to reach the NDC target to produce 300,000 energy-efficient stoves by 2030.

entrepreneur organizations received grants totalling \$120,000 to implement innovative solid and plastic waste management solutions, creating 200 jobs.¹³¹ Innovations included construction materials (tiles and bricks) and petroleum products from plastic waste, as well as fertilizers and charcoal from organic waste. Despite these efforts and potential for scaling up, the investment need in this sector is immense, considering that waste disposal and management efforts deteriorated after the conclusion of a World Bank-funded private sector-led programme.

Overall, the evaluation revealed some missed opportunities for systematic engagement with the private sector in ensuring operationalization of strategies and plans to meet NDC/NAP targets, as well as the implementation of sector-specific plans. Constraints remained in terms of engagement of relevant sectors (e.g., extractive industries), the necessary buy-in on incentives for relevant public-private investments, as well as increased public awareness of climate-environment-health linkages to encourage acceptance and adoption of green solutions. Additionally, there was room to foster more linkages with rule of law and alternative dispute resolution, particularly with regard to climate justice and issues related to land use, protected areas, and concessions.

Finding 11. Livelihoods/job creation and private sector-driven inclusive green growth.¹³² UNDP's efforts to create jobs and improve livelihoods focused mainly on micro- and small enterprises, especially for women and youth, and to some degree on innovation and scaling up in the agricultural sector. The scope and scale were limited by funding constraints and Liberia's high unemployment rate. The degree of consolidation and growth potential varied, while most entrepreneurs remained in the informal sector. The lack of a clear strategy for supply chains and value chain integration in remote areas and prioritized sectors highlights the need for institutionalized programmes, private sector investment, and support for MSMEs, particularly for female entrepreneurs.

During this cycle, UNDP Liberia supported MSME development and private sector-led growth primarily through the Growth Accelerator initiative,¹³³ small business plan competitions, and UNDP core funding. Despite the critical need for employment opportunities and youth entrepreneurship to mitigate conflict drivers, investments in human development, infrastructure, and an enabling environment fell short of targets. UNDP's support was essential for social protection and economic recovery through cash-for-work schemes specifically targeting marginalized and disadvantaged youth through the SEED initiative and boosting start-ups and medium-sized businesses. As part of its resource allocation strategy, the country office aimed to attract private sector investment, having recently formed partnerships with the United Bank of Africa, International Bank Liberia, and the EU – mobilizing \$1 million to enhance MSME access to finance and business development services. For the latter, UNDP partnered with the Bureau of Small Business Administration of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and with start-up development service providers, including iCampus, Business Start-up Centre Monrovia, Orange Foundation, and collaboration with the University of Liberia to set-up a UNIPOD space.

The UNDP Malawi Growth Accelerator model was adapted to the Liberian context. Compared to Malawi's experience and results, the evaluation found more limited national ownership and articulation with a broader national strategy for job creation and business development, including value chain development in the identified core investment areas to spur inclusive and sustainable growth.¹³⁴ During this cycle, UNDP

¹³¹ UNDP Liberia Annual Report 2021.

¹³² CDP Output 3.3: Policies and programmes for promoting small and medium business strengthened.

¹³³ The model aims to drive green growth, job creation, and innovative entrepreneurship development, particularly for youth and women, through business development advisory, financial support and other business instruments to accelerate business cases and solutions and help businesses to grow. The process is based on the logic of co-creation with young entrepreneurs, advisory capacity through local and national companies, as well as the experience of the regional business development ecosystem.

¹³⁴ UNDP Liberia (2023), "Sectoral Policies to drive inclusive growth and productivity in Liberia."

continued to strengthen institutional capacities of the Bureau of Small Business Administration and other agencies for MSME development, including at the decentralized level.¹³⁵ The Bureau, however, remained underfunded and reliant on international cooperation. Stakeholders noted setbacks in MSME development in the past years. Even though Liberia's economic growth relies on them, the enabling environment and overall economic situation did not favour effective operations, including access to finances, assets, and technical advisory. For instance, the lack of enforcement of the Small Business Empowerment Act (2014), which mandates that at least 25 per cent of all public procurement contracts go to Liberian-owned MSMEs, was highlighted.

To date, UNDP and its partners implemented three cohorts of the Growth Accelerator, supporting 47 businesses across seven counties and different sectors with training, mentoring, and grants totalling \$40,000 to scale-up operations and create jobs.¹³⁶ Approximately 40 per cent of these businesses were women-led, and included academic institutions (e.g., Forestry Training Institute and Nimba County Community College). Business plan competitions provided seed money (\$500–\$3,000) for new entrepreneurship ideas to launch, innovate, or expand start-ups. Like the Growth Accelerator, the competition attracted high interest due to the nonexistence of similar opportunities, and resulted in 52 young entrepreneurs (27 women/25 men) being supported across different sectors.¹³⁷ Both modalities helped improve livelihoods, productivity, and profitability according to beneficiary interviews. Challenges remained particularly for micro-enterprises due to the lack of clear growth strategies and evidenced business and technical skill deficiencies. Given that the MSMEs spread across and within seven counties, opportunities for peer learning, cross-fertilization, and value chain articulation were difficult to leverage, while it also added to operational costs for UNDP and partners (e.g., follow-up and M&E).

As there was a need for a clear and systematic strategy for value chain development within the different UNDP initiatives, the second and third cohorts of the Growth Accelerator were geared towards supporting agricultural cooperatives to boost their value chain articulation and employment.¹³⁸ Some spill-over effects were evidenced, such as linking cocoa farmers in Nimba with private buyers through the Chocolate Company Redimere Inc., supported by the Growth Accelerator. The agricultural sector was also supported through other initiatives, including agricultural assets and agricultural grants amounting to \$200,000 to 10 local cooperatives to implement agri-production and commercialization schemes. This support reportedly strengthened supply of agricultural inputs, including seeds to local farmers. In light of UNDP's policy and strategy development support to the palm oil sector, there is potential to foster win-win arrangements for government, business, and producer communities, while addressing climate vulnerability and sustainable solutions. This could be through further development of business incentives (return on investment), promoting innovation, and addressing potential legal or policy barriers to effective engagement and the enabling environment.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ This included support to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to create windows at the CSCs to provide business advisory services and business management services for MSMEs.

¹³⁶ The investment in Cohort I amounted to \$600,000 for 18 businesses. For Cohort II the investment was increased to \$900,000 and attracted an additional \$500,000 from the Embassy of Sweden for Cohort III. Source: UNDP Liberia, Annual Report 2022; ROAR 2023.

¹³⁷ In 2022 the competition attracted 960 applicants (478 women/482 men). Businesses covered agriculture and fishery, soap production, catering, ICT, waste management, fashion, as well as other untapped market niches including toiletries, packaging, and engineering. Source: UNDP Liberia, "Project Progress Report 2022."

¹³⁸ For example: (i) Liberia International Christian College in Nimba (\$25,000 grant) – monthly production of small-scale feed increased by 186%; (ii) Community Empowerment and Innovation in Agriculture Cooperative (\$48,000 grant) – palm seedlings production increased, and village saving and lending groups for women implemented; (iii) Rural Women and Girls Promoters for Sustainable Development (\$40,000 grant) – cassava processing increased from 7 to 40 bags (25 kg bags)/week.

¹³⁹ UNDP supported policy relevant research, including a study (Targeted Scenario Analysis) that compares economic gains and losses from different possible oil palm development paths in Liberia. Source: Eduard T. Niesten and Borwen Sayon (2020), "Targeted Scenario Analysis."

Overall, the evaluation evidenced negative impacts from several policy and structural issues that reduced productivity and profitability for MSMEs. These issues included inadequate infrastructure (roads, electricity, water), lack of awareness about government services and regulations, difficulties importing supplies, competition from cheaper products imported from Guinea and Ivory Coast (e.g., animal feed sector), and challenges in business registration through the CSCs. These factors have led to high production costs, post-harvest losses, and limited market access. Despite the UNDP support to strengthen business support services, CSCs were perceived generally as unequipped to provide them. Services, including tax payments, remain centralized in Monrovia, resulting in higher operational costs and difficulties in formalizing businesses to support their growth, employment opportunities, and contributions. An efficient service delivery at the county level could potentially generate revenue for business development programmes for start-ups. In terms of access to finance, the CPD defined a target of eight banks by 2024 to offer low interest rates (4–6 per cent) to new rural livelihood start-ups. Although steps were taken in this direction through the Growth Accelerator initiative, the evaluation found that challenges for MSMEs were not fully reduced in access to bank loans. Loans were linked to requirements that many small entrepreneurs did not meet. Although UNDP provided guarantees, conditions for a sustainable and inclusive micro-finance scheme were not established. Commercial banks remain reluctant to provide loans due to perceived risk levels and the unsustainability of MSMEs in Liberia. Ultimately, stringent capital requirements for loans resulted in unequal access to finance, particularly challenging for women.

Given the above constraints, UNDP Liberia, with the support of the Regional Bureau for Africa and in collaboration with key line government ministries and agencies, designed the five-year Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP).¹⁴⁰ Replicating and adapting similar UNDP flagship initiatives in Togo, Senegal, the DRC, and The Gambia, the Liberia ACDP envisioned a local industrial development model to address rural-urban disparities, promote community-based development, and mobilize \$100 million from government and development partners for its effective implementation. Despite being based on a feasibility study, it appeared that lessons and challenges from other countries were not fully considered. This refers specifically to financing and operational strategies, integration with broader strategies (e.g., local governance and decentralization), meaningful community-led processes (e.g., prioritization process and governance structures), and a robust oversight and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning system to ensure trust building, accountability, and feedback mechanisms with target communities and society at large. Activities were launched in 2023 with an initial \$3 million from the government and expected funding from the African Development Bank (\$5 million) and the World Bank (\$6 million). To date, the implementation focused on delivering agricultural assets and grants in six out of the seven prioritized counties, and borehole infrastructure work in five locations across Bong, Gbarpolu, and Rivercess.¹⁴¹ The evaluation found little evidence of how these activities are linked to other initiatives mentioned above, as well as to sector-specific development strategies. In addition, launching a large-scale programme without secured funding risked undermining the credibility of UNDP and national involved stakeholders, while the level of national ownership and commitment by line ministries seemed still unclear in light of the election results.

¹⁴⁰ While the programme was not initially foreseen in the CPD, the inclusive green growth (IGG) portfolio included an additional outcome and output linked to it. IGG Outcome 3: Infrastructure at the local level is provided and supports expanded livelihoods and private sector opportunities which reduces household poverty; and associated Output 3.1: Community infrastructure is developed which supports inclusive growth and is established to be sustainable and climate resilient.

¹⁴¹ UNDP Liberia, Project Progress Report 2023.

2.3 Factors influencing programme performance and cross-cutting issues

Finding 12. Implementing modalities and partnership approach. The Liberia country office pursued a broad and active partnership approach, involving a large number of national counterparts, implementing partners, and collaborators. The level and type of engagement varied across initiatives, while a clear strategy and action plans to foster the national implementation modality and around collaboration with non-state actors was missing. While overcoming the country's overdependence on foreign aid and international partners was a goal, overly ambitious commitments and targets undermined the realistic management of expectation on both sides.

UNDP continued to partner closely with the government and institutional counterparts. Most initiatives continued using the direct implementation modality (DIM), despite government partners' expectations or apparent preference for national implementation (NIM). Governance and implementation arrangements, together with funding agreements, planning, and management processes, appeared to have impacted delivery and results, and to a certain extent determined the degree of ownership, institutional strengthening, and, ultimately, sustainability. Additionally, most of the initiatives involved multiple stakeholders and joint programming with other UN agencies, funds, or programmes.¹⁴² This intended to respond to 'Delivery as one' objectives, but seemed primarily driven by donor interests and requirements, and in several cases did not contribute to ensuring national ownership.

Despite expectations, UNDP's post-UNMIL role was only partially transformed during this cycle. Persistent capacity and resource shortfalls hampered the effective exercise of government functions and responsibilities, prompting a certain degree of capacity substitution by UNDP. This included supporting the basic functioning of key institutions and services, such as an energy supply for the CSC and public offices, and for equipment and running costs for the security and justice chains. This also involved implementation support, such as for the Global Health Fund, facilitating procurement processes, and ensuring transparent and sound practices and accountability.

Internal stakeholders and UN partners justified DIM due to weak technical and institutional capacities, compliance and accountability risks, and the need to advance initiatives. However, the document review and interviews indicated that this approach, while based on a valid justification, seemed counterproductive for fostering national ownership and UNDP's efforts for institutional strengthening and capacity development. Despite having coordination spaces and steering structures co-chaired by line ministries, various government partners expressed concern about meaningful participation and decision-making. More specifically, they suggested that the direction and focus of some initiatives felt imposed by the UNCT and donors (e.g., the Spotlight initiative). This perception was even more pronounced at the subnational level and in engagement with local authorities and target groups, largely underscoring a top-down approach.

The gradual transition through assisted NIM and integrating project teams into national institutions, such as the electoral support team, were effective strategies for fostering ownership and institutional strengthening. This approach, compared to project teams (including joint UN teams) working from the UN House, had positive multiplier effects and potential to enhance overarching (rather than project-based) capacity development and knowledge transfer (i.e., twinning partnership models¹⁴³). In addition, despite

¹⁴² These include PBF projects, the Spotlight initiative, and the electoral assistance basket fund, among others, being implemented in collaboration with UN Women, UNFPA, and OHCHR. UNDP co-implemented different initiatives led by other agencies. Collaboration with UNFPA involved gender-based violence (including UNICEF) and support to the National Census. More recent projects involved FAO and WFP.

¹⁴³ Twinning is used by different cooperation agencies (SIDA, NORAD, EU, WB) as an approach that uses institution-to-institution partnerships and peer relationships, with emphasis on professional exchanges and mentoring through accompanied short to long-term technical advisory.

challenges in securing government cost-sharing contributions, the ACDP, allocations for environmental protection, and climate change measures all demonstrated the government's gradual assumption of commitments and responsibilities, along with its interest in collaborating with UNDP.

Collaborations with CSOs, CBOs, and, to some extent, academic institutions were another key pillar of UNDP delivery of the CPD and various implementation arrangements. These were relevant for the implementation of project activities and supported UNDP's territorial scope, overall outreach, and community engagement, and therefore its commitments to the principle of LNOB. Yet, without a clear underlying strategy for civil society strengthening, interviews revealed that these collaborations were less partnership-oriented, but rather more transactional and delivery-focused in nature. The low-value grant modality and UNDP's annual programming cycle and procurement processes¹⁴⁴ favoured short-term, fast-track activities. While recognizing the value of the work and the relevance for CSOs to partner with UN agencies, the modality undermined the enabling environment for transformative outcomes to a large extent (e.g., behavioural change, local empowerment, and confidence building). The evaluation also revealed the financial dependency and unsustainability of these CSOs to operate and follow-up on activities, coupled with significant differences in technical capacities and approaches, and UNDP's limitations for consistent monitoring and supervision on the ground. These issues, combined with unpredictable funding opportunities, resulted in missed opportunities for CSO strengthening and community-led development. Activities delivered were often siloed, which was also evidenced in relation to joint UN programmes. Most stakeholders acknowledged that despite promoting coordination and exchange, each agency implemented the respective activities largely in isolation. Missed opportunities for cross-fertilization were also evidenced for UNDP projects. For example, youth groups organized in eco-brigades were not involved, but also not aware of activities linked to SGBV or electoral support conducted in the same counties and communities.

Efforts to engage and partner with the relatively small Liberian private sector (i.e., medium-size and large corporations) remained incipient, promoted mainly through dialogues and multi-stakeholder platforms, and with some collaboration linked to green business opportunities, entrepreneurship development, and access to finance. Resource mobilization to support the inclusive growth component through the private sector did not yet yield significant results. While acknowledging the importance of involving the private sector for enabling business environments, attracting investment, and securing development finance, UNDP's strategic approach in this area was not yet fully developed nor differentiated based on objectives and opportunities. This also refers to entry points to work with the extractive industries or linked to carbon finance, as well as environmental protection and climate change actions. Stakeholders noted the need for UNDP to adapt and strengthen its engagement strategy by creating a stronger narrative and value proposition to incentivize private sector buy-in and engagement.

Finding 13. Gender-responsive programming and results. UNDP Liberia's whole-in-office efforts and work to advance its Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan were recognizable, with progress in gender-responsive programming and consistent efforts to include women, people with disabilities, and marginalized populations. While some ambitious targets were set, interventions and results remained at the level of being gender-targeted/gender-sensitive. This allowed for progress in strengthening capacities for gender-sensitive service delivery, placing gender issues on the public agenda and in policy frameworks, as well as implementing targeted and affirmative actions.

¹⁴⁴ The lack of multi-year budget cycles and of conditions and thresholds for the implementation of agreements with partners are factors hindering the establishment of medium- and long-term collaboration frameworks with CSOs that favour organizational strengthening and sustainability.

The Liberia CO strived to implement its Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan, emphasizing also the principle of LNOB in all interventions. The Gender Seal process, initiated in 2021, helped advance gender mainstreaming and gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) goals at the organizational level, while strengthening gender-responsive programming. Driven by senior management, the evaluation evidenced the whole-in-office commitment to creating an enabling and inclusive environment and striving for gold certification. Although staff from different sections were involved in the gender focal points team, the CO faced challenges, including not filling the vacant gender specialist position, limited resources, and the absence of a dedicated budget for the Gender Action Plan, which hindered further progress.

On the programme side, gender-responsive programming was emphasized across the CPD, its results statements, and associated portfolios. Over 80 per cent of interventions were marked GEN2 (with significant contributions to GEWE), with a few projects having GEWE as a principal objective.¹⁴⁵ Aside from the Spotlight Programme, women's political participation and support for women candidates, along with the prevention of violence against women in the 2023 elections, endeavoured to address structural barriers for women in Liberia. Close collaboration with UN Women as co-chairs of the Inter-Agency Gender Theme Group and various joint initiatives strengthened the work of both agencies on GEWE. Efforts on gender mainstreaming in development plans and budgets (CPD Outcome 1.1), as well as specific studies (e.g., report on women's agency in trade¹⁴⁶) and concerted advocacy efforts (e.g., introduction of a gender quota) were highlighted.

Various initiatives beyond the inclusive governance portfolio targeted women, marginalized youth, and to some extent people with disabilities as beneficiaries of social protection, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship activities, acknowledging their vulnerability to environmental impacts and climate change. Concerted efforts were made to promote and raise awareness on equal participation; and affirmative actions to select women and PWD in community groups, local committees, and eco-brigades were highlighted in the interviews. Building active citizenship and empowering agency were emphasized, and inclusive participation in multi-stakeholder platforms and decision-making processes was mainstreamed as an objective, particularly in decentralization and local governance agendas, to foster social cohesion and positive peace. There was a lack of differentiated approaches or strategies to address deep and entrenched inequalities across regions, genders, and social groups, as well as their intersection. Accessibility and affordability to receive or claim rights to public services (e.g., access to courts, CSCs, or polling stations) remained a major hindering factor. Short-term social protection measures and relief actions (e.g., COVID response), initiatives such as Solar for Health, and considerations for accessibility in infrastructures addressed basic needs and human rights guarantees. Working with and supporting community organizations, with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion as well as in very remote areas, was considered a good approach used by UNDP to ensure that no one is left behind.

UNDP's efforts in GEWE and LNOB yielded some results, although measuring progress or capturing results beyond the delivery of activities and services and anecdotal evidence proved challenging. Persistent challenges were related to the generation of robust gender-disaggregated data at different levels, capturing best practices and lessons learned, and reporting on results at large. Beyond that, weaknesses remained evident in national statistical capacity, data generation, and maintenance of UNDP-supported systems. With respect to public service delivery, registration of services provided by the CSC, or citizen feedback mechanisms, data was not generated or used consistently to determine improved quality as well

¹⁴⁵ The remaining six projects marked as GEN1 were carried out from the previous cycle and were linked to technical assistance and institutional capacity development initiatives, with limited budgeted allocation. In terms of expenditures, according to data extracted in March 2024, 87% of expenditures (approximately \$34.9 million) were linked to GEN2 projects.

¹⁴⁶ The report promotes gender mainstreaming of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement by identifying barriers and opportunities that women can explore to enhance their abilities to fully benefit from the agreement.

as access or responsiveness to existing disparities and differentiated needs. The Liberia 2022 Population and Housing Census, supported by the UNCT, and biometric voter registration represented crucial steps towards creating databases for tailored national development planning and UNDP programming. As for transformative change, progress remained incipient and slow in a highly patriarchal system marked by rigid traditional gender norms, underscoring the need to continue raising awareness and redefining strategies and approaches.

Finding 14. Results-based management and monitoring and evaluation. The country office made concerted efforts to strengthen results-based management and monitoring and evaluation practices, both internally and with partners. The absence of a comprehensive system for monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning constrained the UNDP country programme, particularly affecting the capacity to document learning for adaptive management and strategic decision-making. Limited capacity to substantiate and showcase results, including progress as well as failures, ultimately undermined UNDP's positioning, accountability, credibility, and opportunities for resource mobilization.

The hiring of M&E personnel for flagship projects was an important step for strengthening systems, tools, and reporting capacities, including the capacity-building of implementing partners, to improve project monitoring on the ground and the quality of the reporting. The Programme Management Support Unit remained limited in terms of dedicated staff for more systematic oversight and cross-cutting support throughout the programme cycle, while being absorbed by identifying and negotiating funding opportunities.

Despite improvements, generating robust data and measuring and reporting on change at the outcome level remained a difficulty. Geographic dispersion, resource constraints, and varying capacities of implementing partners added to this challenge. This affected not only UNDP's capacity for effective oversight and adaptive management but also the ability to document progress and achievements linked to strategic outcomes and, ultimately, to mobilize resources. The desk review and interviews showed that these flaws were particularly noted in the design of successor projects and donor reporting, due to weaknesses in the evidence base and in terms of critical reflection.

Driven by accountability within UNDP corporate systems and to donors, project M&E and reporting remained largely focused on activity and output. Moreover, evaluations conducted in the current and previous cycles revealed persistent areas for improvement. Among these were operational and M&E aspects, gender mainstreaming, as well as the sustainability of investments (i.e., ownership and exit strategies). On the other hand, many recent decentralized evaluations and donor reports seemed overly positive in their assessment of achievements, while focusing less on the learning aspects with respect to what worked and what did not, given the existing constraints and challenges to inform necessary course corrections effectively.

The evaluation revealed a weak alignment and harmonization between results frameworks, as well as limited coherence between indicators at different levels. This made it difficult for project-level data to feed into higher levels, namely portfolios, CPD, and UNSDCF, while informing the PAPD and national SDG targets. The latter was a challenge shared by the UNCT. Given limited national statistical capacities, the rigorous reporting and measurement of UNSDCF results, as well as contributions to national goals, remained a weakness overall. This suggests the need for strengthened national statistical capacity and a more integrated and results-oriented monitoring and evaluation system and practices for the UNSDCF that could be used in decision-making, programming, and creating coherence across outcomes at the higher level and UNDP CPD outputs.

Ultimately, the development of a common narrative across the country programme was not fully enhanced by the portfolio approach and the specific portfolio results frameworks. The data generated at the project level appeared to feed into the portfolio and CPD results frameworks only to some extent and with limited value for strategic decision-making, including adaptation to changing needs, course corrections, or revision of targets. This was also a weakness in relation to reporting on contributions to GEWE and LNOB, and to generally engaging stakeholders and target groups more effectively around impact stories and feedback loops. Ultimately, the external CPD mid-term review conducted at the end of 2022 triggered limited actions to address the recommendations, particularly in relation to strengthening CPD indicators, the measurement of results and contributions, as well as the mismatch among targets, funding forecasts, and constraints.

Finding 15. Comparative advantage and added value. Filling the gaps left by the UNMIL withdrawal persisted both as a need and expectation of government partners towards the UN, particularly UNDP. Due to its broad mandate and leadership position in the governance, justice, and security sectors, UNDP continued to reaffirm its instrumental role in consolidating peace and security. The country office faced the challenge of striking the right balance between responsiveness and the need to expand its footprint in a context of resource constraints, resulting in scattered and thinly spread interventions and engagement in areas where its comparative advantage and expertise are not demonstrated.

During this cycle, UNDP maintained its position as interlocutor and development partner of choice, leveraging trusted relationships, high-level convening power, the holistic approach to development, and access to resources. Moreover, the inherent comparative advantage in facilitating and supporting coordination structures and platforms at the central level was broadly acknowledged by partners and donors. UNDP retained a distinctive role of intergovernmental liaison and coordination, including in support of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. This entailed the leadership of technical working groups/task forces, such as in the rule of law space and electoral support, while playing an integrator role around the support of the national SDGs agenda.

Interviews with partners and donors highlighted UNDP's strength in capitalizing on regional and global expertise, promoting successful approaches, and disseminating best practices. Nonetheless, the evaluation evidenced prevailing constraints in the Liberian context, including national capacity gaps to fully adopt international best practices and models or even replicate initiatives from other African countries. In trying to make them fit for purpose, UNDP faced challenges to balance risk appetite and innovative solutions with realistic appraisals of counterparts' absorptive capacity and overall limitations. Despite support from the Regional Bureau for Africa, replicating regional flagship initiatives (such as the ACDP initiatives) posed risks, including unrealistic expectations for large-scale funding mobilization, and challenges related to the effective integration of lessons from other countries. The evaluation also evidenced the need for continuous strengthening of in-house capacities, ensuring senior-level technical staff, resources, and time for strategic thinking processes so as to allow for the adoption and promotion of new approaches and innovation.

During this cycle, the CO aimed to expand and leverage its downstream work through a multi-pronged, area-based approach to development. Despite efforts for better alignment, top-down, fragmented, and isolated strategies prevailed, both internally and in the context of inter-agency coordination on the ground. Cross-fertilization was not fully achieved in all thematic areas, particularly in inclusive and green growth initiatives, where other cooperation agencies were involved with similar or complementary work. UNDP's added value was most evident and recognized with regard to the enabling environment, particularly in governance, policy work, and high-level technical advisory roles. Despite coordination, overlaps and mandate overreaches were evident among multilateral stakeholders. In a context of scarce resources, the focus on synergies and comparative advantages seemed to be diluted by funding needs and targets.

Various national and international partners saw UNDP as well positioned to play a more catalytic role in strengthening convergence at the decentralized level, including community-based approaches and structures. The ACDP model promoted by UNDP provided this kind of opportunity, as well as the process of SDG integration and localization, which have yet to fully materialize. Progress in these areas was hampered by resource constraints and other pressing priorities, such as the focus on the electoral process. To address the structural drivers of conflict, stakeholders recognized that more integrated, locally driven, and evidence-based development strategies remain crucial. This is where UNDP has a global track record, and where its role and support in operationalizing these strategies continues to have the greatest added value.

Finding 16. Sustainability. The sustainability of actions and investments made by UNDP in Liberia, both in the current cycle and long-term, remained a major concern. Beyond the need to address broader impediments to progress and lessons from past cycles, many interventions lacked clear action plans and conditions for sustaining implemented processes, services, or structures, challenging UNDP's efforts this cycle. The electoral support workstream is a good example of how to build and foster sustainability through the transformation of roles and responsibilities, including the assumption of financial responsibilities for full national ownership.

The limited diversification of funding sources coupled with the reliance on and high share of core funding pose a risk to the sustainability of the country office. This funding issue also affects UNDP's human resources, hindering the ability to maintain or incorporate senior-level technical advisory roles (e.g., the Strategy and Policy Unit and Chief Technical Advisors¹⁴⁷). The evaluation found that losing these technical capacities contrasts with the need to maintain positioning and an innovative development offer, and with the ability to capitalize on opportunities, especially in the field of environment, energy, and climate financing (i.e., more vertical funds and new funding mechanisms). The support and technical advice of the Regional Office was essential to successfully secure funding for these areas of work.

The 2012 ADR conducted by IEO highlighted critical areas needing attention for UNDP's programming and for transformative and sustainable development results, which remain applicable today.¹⁴⁸ Limited financial contributions to the projects represented only one factor, but more importantly, the lack of minimum resource allocation within the national budget undermined any gains made in terms of policy development, effective public service delivery, or systems and platforms put in place (e.g., case management system, Climate Change Knowledge Sharing Digital Platform, Multi-stakeholders' Waste Resource Recovery Project). Unlike other flagship work streams, electoral support managed to gradually shift responsibilities from externally funded electoral processes to the 2023 nationally funded elections. The type of technical assistance provided by UNDP and international partners in this process also evolved, which is a relevant indication of change processes.

Project documents generally described sustainability aspects or exit strategies, but effective monitoring or testing of assumptions during implementation was lacking. This affected national ownership, delegation of responsibilities, and effective consolidation of results, as noted in several decentralized evaluations.¹⁴⁹ Donors expressed concerns about the value for money and sustainability of investments, as well as the lack of innovative programming, thus influencing funding decisions such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's discontinuation of support for the Rule of Law component; and

¹⁴⁷ At the time of the evaluation, the Strategy and Policy Unit was reduced in size with one remaining staff and several positions remained vacant, including the Chief Technical Advisor for Rule of Law.

¹⁴⁸ These include aspects linked to: (i) more thematically and geographically targeted work; (ii) a coherent, strategic, and comprehensive programming approach; (iii) transition from quickly implemented projects to longer-term development activities with national leadership; and (iv) explicit and practical exit strategies for each project, with emphasis on earmarking costs in the national budget.

¹⁴⁹ MTR Spotlight 2021; MTR CPD 2022; LDSP II 2024.

increased conditionality for government contributions, such as for Green Climate Fund disbursement. With core work spanning multiple programming cycles, UNDP Liberia reached a critical juncture of: (i) finding the balance between demand and supply; (ii) addressing the dynamics of funding dependence; and (iii) the need to show results regarding long-term investments and to enhance the sustainability of these development investments.

The evaluation revealed that the continuity of many processes was uncertain due to changes in government and the rotation of decision-makers or those driving certain initiatives. There were clear risks that the changes could jeopardize institutional and training efforts. Project reports highlighted issues of financial and institutional sustainability and the lack of political will, whereas concerns were also raised in interviews regarding the technical levels and overall high staff rotation, which renders the institution and capacity-building efforts highly unsustainable. Despite years of investment in reforms and policy work, consolidation remained limited and depended on the new authorities' directions. Stakeholders emphasized the need for advocacy to gain national buy-in for implementing legal frameworks (e.g., the Revenue Sharing Act) and retaining technical and middle management staff. The ACDP initiative was largely unfunded, and its effective implementation is unlikely without the buy-in and financial commitment of the new government, despite indications of an increased focus on local development. While no major changes in development priorities were expected, the upcoming elaboration of a new national development strategy during 2024 would necessarily entail a revision of strategies and approaches.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



This chapter presents the evaluation conclusions on UNDP performance and contributions to development results in Liberia during the programme cycle 2020–2024, as well as the recommendations and management response.

3.1 Conclusions

During this cycle, UNDP Liberia navigated the implementation of its country programme against a backdrop of years of economic stagnation and external shocks that threatened the country's fragile peace and development trajectory. After a 12-year period of stabilization and the end of the UNMIL mandate, the first peaceful transition of government in 2018 marked a new chapter for Liberia, embodied in the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018–2023. Building on the peace trajectory, the Joint Government/UN Transition Plan and long-standing support and investments, UNDP was positioned, due to its mandate, to continue to play a pivotal role during this cycle. To achieve positive and lasting peace, it was necessary to address the weak capacities of public institutions, affected by entrenched corruption, deep economic and social inequalities, lack of reconciliation, and the persistence of drivers of conflict, division, and mistrust within the social fabric of the country. Declining donor focus, new crises affecting the development trajectory, and the high dependence on foreign aid in a context of persistent structural constraints challenged the government and international partners to meet ambitious goals and targets. The stocktaking of UNDP's CPD implementation showed areas of progress, some relevant gains, and certain setbacks, but above all it demonstrated efforts to maintain processes and help consolidate peace. Following the remarkable milestone of a successful, nationally owned electoral process and the peaceful transition of power, a new government took office in January 2024. With the next national development strategy to be elaborated, UNDP Liberia stands at a critical juncture to continue the transition of its role beyond the UNMIL legacy, and to redefine its strategic development offer and overall positioning.

In light of the findings presented above, the evaluation team's main conclusions in response to the four central evaluation questions of the ICPE evaluation are presented below.

Conclusion 1. Responsiveness. Recognized for its essential role, UNDP's work in Liberia during this cycle balanced responsiveness to emerging needs, the demands of key government counterparts, and opportunities to advance specific agendas. Given the implementation challenges due to contextual and institutional constraints and the broader context of declining development funding, UNDP prioritized efforts that would avoid setbacks and the loss of decades of investment. Currently and going forward, this level of ambition and expectations, coupled with assumptions about national ownership and responsibilities, remains difficult to realize in this context.

UNDP Liberia remained a leading development partner, recognized for its long-standing and critical work across many arenas and behind relevant gains. Its strategic positioning allowed it to influence and assist government partners in advancing the peace and development agendas, which translated into expectations to respond to the PADP 2018–2023 priorities with an ambitious country programme. Given the point of departure of this cycle, several assumptions about the context, national capacities, political economy, and resource mobilization (domestic and international) proved overly optimistic and challenging to realize. The mismatch between ambitious targets and resource forecasts, along with the need to build ownership and reduce aid dependency, posed significant challenges. Moreover, the 20-year peace process continued to face tests due to internal and external crises. UNDP's demand-driven and flexible approach was praised by national partners, but showed less signs of mutual responsibility and accountability. In the absence of absorption capacity and minimum resources, gaps in public service delivery continued to be filled by UNDP and other international development partners, prioritizing institutional support over other identified priorities.

Conclusion 2. Strategic and programmatic approach. UNDP Liberia’s intervention strategies remained largely anchored in the UNMIL legacy and guided by regional practices and international standards, with some efforts to drive innovation and strategically invest core financial resources. Given the persistent gaps in achieving benchmarks and targets set, the fitness for purpose of certain approaches was somewhat limited. This underscored the need to strategically reorient and rethink core activities, especially institution and capacity-building approaches as well as the programmatic focus.

The country office maintained consistency in the type of support, interventions, and activities, while expanding the breadth of its technical portfolio. Despite efforts to focus on more people-centred interventions at the subnational level, UNDP did not move beyond the institutional and state-centred perspective, although limited results and evidence warranted course corrections and adaption of approaches. Efforts to support civil participation, oversight, and social accountability through digital tools were mostly ineffective due to low uptake and lack of institutionalization. The attempt to address numerous priorities and demands overburdened the country office’s capacity and led to scattered ad hoc responses, mostly without strategic intent. This also affected the investment of significant amounts of core resources, even to finance basic recurring costs, without being able to obtain additional financing or to scale-up. The area-based approach, integrated programming, and investments in strategy-based catalytic activities were envisaged in the CPD, but were not followed through and could have contributed to more impactful results. The geographical expansion, albeit recognizable in terms of LNOB, ultimately resulted in a more limited reach and less transformative change for marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Conclusion 3. Contributions to inclusive governance. UNDP Liberia continued to lead in a range of areas to support the governance, security, and justice sectors in pursuit of effective, inclusive, and gender-responsive public service delivery. The electoral support work stood out for its contributions to key governance and development objectives, and as a reflection of UNDP’s long-standing efforts to strengthen electoral stakeholders. In the justice sector, for decentralization and support to conflict prevention UNDP remained a key driving force, but with difficulties to show meaningful results and to ensure absorption capacity and ownership to consolidate its work effectively.

UNDP was widely recognized for its role in strengthening the institutional enabling environment. Key national and sectoral planning processes and inter-institutional collaboration were enhanced, legal and policy frameworks were strengthened to varying degrees in all flagship areas, and Liberia’s national institutions administered free, fair, and peaceful elections. Contributions to gender issues, addressing some of the serious limitations to women’s inclusion and rights, including SGBV and violence against women in electoral processes, were relevant. At the institutional and policy level and regarding its ability to foster multi-stakeholder engagement, UNDP’s comparative advantages and value added were best realized. While changes in the enabling environment are crucial, their effective implementation remains largely a pending task. Issues related to political will, enforcement of commitments, and accountability appear to have weighed more heavily than resource constraints, resulting in more limited progress than anticipated. Addressing these issues strategically and leveraging alternative approaches to remain positioned particularly in the rule of law space is a priority moving forward.

Conclusion 4. Contributions to inclusive green growth. UNDP Liberia’s strong leadership in advancing the climate change agenda and the allocation of core resources for inclusive growth were key to the implementation of the portfolio. The multiple initiatives involving UN partners, government, and non-state actors at the national level and delivered on the ground yielded mixed and scattered results across the various thematic areas. In areas where UNDP competes with other development agencies, it missed opportunities to integrate activities across both portfolios into a cohesive area-based and community-level development programme framework.

Significant investments secured for the CPD Outcome 3 interventions boosted this area of work and confirmed UNDP's role as a leading development partner in climate change. This did not materialize equally for the use of core resources to support job creation, entrepreneurship development, and to drive green growth. A clear, articulated, and evidence-based strategy to support these initiatives was lacking, as was the ability to more effectively leverage strategic public-private partnerships within priority sectors in pursuit of the objectives of removing structural barriers for SMEs and value chain development and integration. While UNDP's comparative advantages in the implementation on the ground are less strong on the technical side, the cross-fertilization with other areas of work – from resilience building, to alternative dispute resolution, to the local governance agenda – represented opportunities for the country office's strategic positioning.

Conclusion 5. Implementation arrangements and sustainability. UNDP's work in the current cycle continued to be largely constrained in terms of sustainability of service, activities, and benefits, including in areas of long-standing support and investments. The country office's collaborative and partnership approaches maintained rather than reduced dependence on international cooperation, and will continue to undermine efforts towards long-term creation of institutional capacity, national ownership, and sustainability of investments if not strategically redefined.

The current implementation modalities supported to a limited extent capacity-building, the shift of roles and responsibilities, and national ownership. This also hindered the wider adoption and sustainability of outputs and outcomes, as well as the potential to scale-up both pilots and public service delivery. Despite the operational and financial constraints and institutional weaknesses, approaches involving assisted NIM and teams embedded in ministries, agencies, and commissions could have been leveraged more strategically. Partnership approaches and implementation arrangements were driven by a focus on delivery and compliance, and by donor requirements, which proved particularly challenging for small CSOs/NGOs. The implementation of the initiatives, even in the flagship areas, lacked a long-term perspective and a clear understanding of UNDP's goals in terms of institutional strengthening, broader capacity development, the engagement of non-state actors, and, ultimately, the phasing out of its support.

Conclusion 6. Country office's adaptive management and learning. For the most part, the Liberia country office has done well in navigating changes and challenges, including those related to financial and human resources. Concerted efforts to improve coherence, efficiency, and overall performance were driven by the adoption of the portfolio approach. While internal and external change processes began to yield results, further investments and clear strategies are needed to refine UNDP's value proposition and results-based management practices to inform strategic decision-making and for innovative programming and learning.

The country office as a whole managed to mitigate and minimize gaps at the technical, strategic, and leadership levels following the departure of key personnel, including the Resident Representative, and in periods of secondments. While this speaks to its strengths, it overburdened the team and affected both the CPD implementation and UNDP's strategic positioning, especially during a demanding election year. The loss of technical expertise hindered the ability to provide high-level technical advice and influence, critical reflection, and to drive innovation and opportunities more strategically. This demanded more support from the Regional Bureau for Africa to fill technical gaps and for resource mobilization. Relying more on external experts reduced the benefits of in-house expertise, such as close collaboration, continuous capacity transfer, and fostering national ownership. Ultimately, the country office's capacities to ensure strategic and forward-looking programming were challenged, including its positioning in new areas and repositioning in flagship areas. Resource constraints and weaknesses in the use of evidence, monitoring, and reporting added to these challenges, undermining the ability to course-correct and deliver and account for result.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. For the upcoming country programme and in anticipation of Liberia’s forthcoming national development strategy, UNDP must pursue a more focused strategy, prioritizing consolidation, building on the portfolio approach, and setting achievable goals. Overly ambitious targets must be avoided, instead refocusing thematically and geographically on priority areas and investment needs. This implies a clear understanding of the office’s comparative advantages, and recognition of where contributions will be sustained and scaled up, which may require targeting fewer counties, but with deepened and more impactful interventions.

A thorough, robust, and realistic Theory of Change must guide UNDP’s integrated programmatic offer in Liberia to respond to agreed and recognized pathways of change. The emphasis on core intervention areas and most effective activities should strengthen the programming and strategic resource allocation and enable achievable contributions to the national challenges and milestones defined for the next four years. This requires focused investments through core funding where most needed and action plans that support change processes at the system level, while overcoming the dispersion of efforts focused on demand and delivery. This might imply working less downstream or focusing on only a few counties to implement an integrated and interconnected pilot portfolio around locally driven development anchored in multi-sector strategies and the local governance agenda. With well-defined areas and strategies of support, fewer key partners, and fostering complementarities across approaches and interventions with other development partners, UNDP Liberia will be able to reduce operational costs and support more impactful results.

Recommendation 2. The new administration’s commitments to accountability and transparency, as well as its vision for Liberia’s development through the ARREST Agenda¹⁵⁰ and comprehensive and interconnected development strategies, provides UNDP with an opportunity to consolidate ongoing processes. This requires attention to the transition of roles and responsibility and the conditions for sustainability, while acknowledging resource constraints, operational realities, and the need for better adapted strategies.

Clear and realistic action plans should be developed built on an appraisal of the main gaps and priorities for the consolidation of work in rule of law and access to justice, decentralization, and electoral support. Given the renewed commitment to the decentralization agenda, UNDP is well positioned to support the government in implementing the roadmap and action plan for the effective operationalization of the revenue sharing act through the defined institutional and governance structures. Regarding electoral support, with resources secured until 2026, UNDP should continue transitioning its technical support and advisory role with a realistic exit plan in mind. The identified constraints in the rule of law work indicate that UNDP should significantly reorient strategy away from the supply side towards a more people-centred approach, paying particular attention to the civil and land issues that continue to drive conflict. Strengthening linkages between conflict prevention/resolution, resilience building, social cohesion, and the rule of law is crucial. This entails focusing more on aligning formal and informal justice systems, ADR mechanisms, and community-level structures and capacities. Each priority area’s action plan should clearly and transparently define commitments, roles, responsibilities, measurable milestones, and realistic investment needs.

¹⁵⁰ Acronym for Agriculture, Roads, Rule of Law, Education, Sanitation, and Tourism. Outlined in the 100 Day Action Plan.

Recommendation 3. The broad recognition of the need for locally driven and strengthened articulation of development interventions at the subnational level presents opportunities for UNDP Liberia to leverage its convener and coordination role, including the effective localization of the SDGs. Based on its comparative advantages, the country office should further focus on conflict drivers and the removal of structural barriers in the enabling environments for the inclusive green growth areas of work.

The subnational level requires renewed attention to strategic planning processes, articulation of development strategies and interventions, and efforts to effectively support community-driven development and the SDG agenda among cooperation partners. UNDP has comparative advantages in these areas and could support better integration of development strategies and approaches, especially where downstream interventions are hampered by ineffective enabling environments. For ongoing interventions and emerging priorities linked to green growth, land governance, climate change mitigation, and environmental protection, UNDP should focus on high-impact strategic activities. To ensure this, there is a need to understand progress, shortcomings, and hindering factors, as well as the necessary conditions to achieve effective implementation of institutional and policy frameworks that will allow for scalable results and impacts on key development objectives. At the same time, the country office should avoid areas in which it has limited substantive expertise compared to other development partners, such as support to the agricultural or fishery sectors. Where possible and financially feasible, UNDP should consider establishing a stronger territorial presence to support local development agendas more effectively and ensure robust monitoring on the ground.

Recommendation 4. The transition to a national implementation modality should be pursued gradually and prioritized where feasible, while revising overall UNDP's partnership approach with governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as within joint UN programming and in collaboration with the RCO.

UNDP Liberia should capitalize on lessons from its capacity development and institutional strengthening approaches and reflect critically with partners on areas for improvement. Given the engagement with the new authorities and efforts to ensure continuity and reconfirm commitments for ongoing initiatives and work, it is necessary to revise, together with UN partners and national counterparts, ongoing implementation arrangements as well as capacity development, technical, and operational support needs. This includes operational, fiduciary, oversight, and accountability aspects to facilitate the gradual transition to NIM. Capacity development should go beyond project implementation and should prioritize embedded teams to foster broader change processes in target institutions. Regarding partnerships with non-governmental stakeholders, in particular NGOs engaged in community-based activities, UNDP must focus on a smaller number of potential partners, and must assess conditions and requirements to establish partnership frameworks for medium- to long-term arrangements. This approach would add value by providing more effective capacity development and support for advocacy work related to gender, diversity, and inclusion.

Recommendation 5. The country office must continue to drive its value proposition and resource mobilization by strengthening results-based systems, reporting and feedback practices, and communication of results. These efforts imply the need to establish a clear and cohesive narrative of what UNDP has achieved and aims to achieve in Liberia, and to harmonize results and indicator frameworks to effectively measure progress, results, and change.

UNDP Liberia should develop a strategy and engagement plan to support resource mobilization around a strengthened value proposition and consolidation of the portfolio approach. The renewal of existing partnerships, and the mobilization of new partnerships, requires an improved ability to demonstrate and communicate results. Addressing identified weaknesses in the design and implementation of results and indicator frameworks; putting in place a comprehensive, robust, and gender-responsive Monitoring,

Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning system; and emphasizing adaptive learning processes with key partners, stakeholders, and donors is crucial. The country office should further invest in the generation of gender and disaggregated data (including support for national statistical capacities), internal and external feedback and reporting mechanisms, as well as whole-in-office knowledge management, learning, and evaluation capacities. Recommendations and management responses from past and recent decentralized evaluations should be critically reviewed to understand why change processes were not triggered and how to better capitalize on lessons and evaluative evidence. Future evaluations and any assessment should be based on a clear understanding of how they will serve decision-making and accountability and will support learning within the country office and national counterparts.

Recommendation 6. In developing the new country programme and prioritizing areas of intervention, UNDP should invest in internal capacities, especially in senior technical advisory roles and cross-cutting areas (e.g., gender, Programme Management Support Unit), to strengthen its value proposition and to drive innovation in priority and emerging thematic areas.

In-house expertise is crucial to further drive strategic programming and positioning based on continuous learning, creativity, and innovation. As part of the sense-making process and conceptualization of the next CPD, it is essential to create spaces for critical reflection, learning, and exchange. These spaces should be used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current country office structure and to identify capacity gaps. This process should also involve revising the restructuring efforts that followed the adoption of the portfolio approach, with support from the Regional Bureau for Africa, to pinpoint areas needing further adjustments to strategically leverage resources and competencies within the country office and to fill remaining gaps (i.e., new recruitments or secondments). Additionally, the innovation potential in the Liberian context and the fitness for purpose need to be thoroughly assessed when replicating or adapting approaches or intervention models from other countries or UNDP globally. This involves systematically using evaluation evidence and documented lessons learned to improve strategies, approaches, and the design of new interventions.

3.3 Key Recommendations and Management Response

RECOMMENDATION 1.

For the upcoming country programme and in anticipation of Liberia’s forthcoming national development strategy, UNDP must pursue a more focused strategy, prioritizing consolidation, building on the portfolio approach and setting achievable goals. Overly ambitious targets must be avoided, instead refocusing thematically and geographically on priority areas and investment needs. This implies a clear understanding of the office’s comparative advantages, and recognition of where contributions will be sustained and scaled up, which may require targeting less counties but with deepened and more impactful interventions.

Management response: **Accepted**

The country office is in the process of designing its CPD for the period 2026–2030, which will establish the foundation for a portfolio approach. The CPD will take into consideration the strengths and comparative advantages of UNDP, including its normative role. UNDP Liberia will implement this strategy to ensure impactful and focused interventions in key thematic and geographic areas. The portfolio approach will be the vehicle that drives significant progress and supports Liberia’s sustainable development.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement: Conduct comprehensive needs assessments to identify key priority areas. Engage with local communities, government officials, and other stakeholders to ensure alignment with the needs of the people.	January— April 2025	UNDP Management		
1.2 Thematic Focus: In the development of the 2026–2030 CPD, prioritize key thematic areas such as accountability and transparency, climate actions, livelihood, resilience, sustainable energy, service delivery, good governance, and rule of law to address key developmental challenges in prioritized areas.	January— August 2025	UNDP Management		
1.3 Geographic Targeting: Identify and focus on high-need counties or regions, including the One UN hub, where interventions can have the most significant impact.	January— August 2025	UNDP Management		

RECOMMENDATION 2.

The new administration’s commitments to accountability and transparency, as well as its vision for Liberia’s development through the ARREST agenda and comprehensive and interconnected development strategies, provides UNDP with an opportunity to consolidate ongoing processes. This requires attention to the transition of roles and responsibility, conditions for sustainability, while acknowledging resource constraints, operational realities and the need for better adapted strategies.

Management response: **Accepted**

To align with the government’s national development efforts, the upcoming CPD will be directly connected to the ARREST Agenda. As a first step, UNDP provided both technical and financial support enabling wide range and diverse consultations, leading up to the design of the New National Plan the Arrest Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID). This approach acknowledges the importance of supporting the government’s initiatives for national development. The country office will prioritize regions identified by the government as the most vulnerable and in need of substantial developmental support, while also considering resource limitations.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Strengthen Governance and Accountability: Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and ensure transparency and foster a culture of accountability by regularly reporting on outcomes and challenges.	July— August 2025	PMSU		
2.2 CPD Governance Structure: The country office will establish a governance structure to oversee the CPD, including roles and responsibilities in decision-making, monitoring, and reporting	February— March 2025	UNDP Management		
2.3 Resource Management: Optimize the use of available resources by prioritizing high-impact areas and seeking additional funding and partnerships to address resource constraints.	July— August 2025	UNDP Management		

RECOMMENDATION 3.

The broad recognition of the need for locally driven and strengthened articulation of development interventions at the subnational level, presents opportunities for UNDP Liberia to leverage its convener and coordination role, including the effective localization of the SDGs. Based on its comparative advantages, the country office should further focus on conflict drivers and the removal of structural barriers in the enabling environments for the inclusive green growth areas of work.

Management response: **Accepted**

UNDP will use the new CPD to strengthen partnership with national and local governments and collaboratively identify barriers to development. It will also devise strategies and implement initiatives to remove such barriers both at the national and subnational levels. UNDP will involve relevant stakeholders in planning processes to ensure buy-in and gather diverse perspectives on development issues.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1a Strengthen Local Governance: Support local governance structures to enhance their capacity for conflict resolution and peacebuilding and promote inclusive decision-making processes that involve all community members, including marginalized groups.	March-August 2026	Inclusive Governance		
3.1.b Strengthen Partnerships: Prioritize deepening collaborations with existing partners, including governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector. This ensures that UNDP can maximize the impact of its ongoing interventions by leveraging existing resources, expertise, and networks.	January—August 2025	UNDP Management		
3.2 Policy Advocacy and Reform: Advocate for policies that address structural barriers to economic and social inclusion, and work with the government and other stakeholders to reform policies that perpetuate inequality and exclusion.	July—October 2026	Inclusive Governance		
3.3 Partnerships and Collaboration: Leverage partnerships with other UN agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to enhance the impact of interventions, and coordinate efforts to ensure an integrated developmental approach through community engagement and social cohesion.	January—August 2025	UNDP Management		

RECOMMENDATION 4.

The transition to a national implementation modality should be pursued gradually and prioritized where feasible, while revising overall UNDP’s partnership approach with governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as within joint UN programming and in collaboration with the RCO.

Management response: **Accepted**

The institutional capacities of national entities have not yet been fully developed to enable the country office to transition to a complete NIM at this juncture. Nevertheless, UNDP Liberia will take substantial measures to enhance the capacities of national institutions, thereby facilitating a future transition to full NIM. This strategy is designed to ensure that development interventions are both sustainable and impactful. In the forthcoming CPD, UNDP Liberia will champion an expedited and well-coordinated movement towards national ownership, underpinned by a refined partnership strategy and strengthened collaboration across UNDP initiatives.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Focus on Joint UN Programming: Work closely with the Resident Coordinator’s Office to ensure alignment and coherence in UN programming. This includes participating in joint planning and implementation processes, and integrated approaches.	July— October 2026	PMSU, Inclusive Governance and Inclusive Green Growth		
4.2 Resource Mobilization: Seek funding from a variety of sources, including international donors, private sector partners, and innovative financing mechanisms.	January— December 2026	UNDP Management		
4.3 Revise Partnership Approach: Cultivate stronger relationships with government entities by aligning UNDP interventions with national priorities to support development efforts. Engage civil society and the private sector to leverage their expertise and resources. This includes forming strategic alliances and signing MoUs to formalize collaborations.	January— August 2025	UNDP Management		

RECOMMENDATION 5.

The country office must continue to drive its value proposition and resource mobilization by strengthening results-based systems, reporting and feedback practices and communication of results. These efforts imply the need to establish a clear and cohesive narrative of what UNDP has achieved and aims to achieve in Liberia, and harmonized results and indicator frameworks to effectively measure progress, results and change.

Management response: **Accepted**

UNDP Liberia will develop a strong monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as a partnership and communication strategy, within the next CPD. Additionally, it will create a resource mobilization plan aimed at effectively disseminating results and ongoing development initiatives. This approach will help to attract resources and enhance the visibility of UNDP and its contributions to national development.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Enhance reporting and feedback Practices: Ensure reporting of development results is accessible to all stakeholders, including donors, government partners, and the public. Establish mechanisms for collecting feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders. Use this feedback to refine and improve programmes.	January— December 2026	PMSU		
5.2 Strengthen Results-Based Systems: Establish harmonized results and indicator frameworks that align with the ARREST Agenda and the SDGs. This will help to effectively measure progress, results, and change. Also, implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the impact of interventions. Use data analytics to identify trends and areas for improvement.	January— December 2026	PMSU		
5.3 Effective Communication of Results: Develop a cohesive narrative that highlights UNDP's achievements and future goals in Liberia and that demonstrates the impact of UNDP's work while using various medium, including social media, videos, infographics, and success stories, to share results and engage a broader audience.	January— December 2026	Communication		

RECOMMENDATION 6.

In developing the new country programme and prioritizing areas of intervention, UNDP should invest in internal capacities, especially in senior technical advisory roles and cross-cutting areas (gender, PMSU) to strengthen its value proposition and to drive innovation in priority and emerging thematic areas.

Management response: **Accepted**

There is a need to enhance the capabilities of specific units, and the country office plans to pursue this objective in the upcoming CPD.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Gender Mainstreaming: Ensure that gender is incorporated into every phase of project planning and execution while leveraging the expertise of the CO gender specialist.	January—December 2026	UNDP management		
6.2 Joint Initiatives: UNDP will collaborate with other UN agencies and development partners on joint initiatives that address cross-cutting issues and will leverage collective strengths.	January—December 2026	UNDP Management		

* The implementation status is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Center 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/detail/24140>

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 1a. Evaluation Matrix

Annex 2. Country at a glance

Annex 3. Country office at a glance

Annex 4. Programme coverage and prioritization

Annex 5. Project List

Annex 6. Documents consulted

Annex 7. Status of country programme outcome & output indicators

Annex 8. Performance rating



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