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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION CUBA



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responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: CUBA

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ACRONYMS

AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
ALASS	Local Self-Sufficiency for a Sustainable and Healthy Diet project
BASAL	Environmental Basis for Local Food Sustainability
CABEI	Central American Bank for Economic Integration
CCA	Climate change adaptation
CCB	Cuban Central Ban
CEDEM	University of Havana Centre for Demographic Studies
CIFFRA	Support to the Formation of the INFF for the SDGs in Cuba
CITMA	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
CPD	Country programme document
CSO	Civil society organizations
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
Global Fund	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
GNI	Gross national income
GRES	Gender Results Effectiveness Scale
HCFC	Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
ICT	Information communication technologies
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organization,
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
INRH	National Institute of Hydraulic Resources
INOTU	National Institute of Land Use and Urban Planning
INSMET	Institute of Meteorology
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
LNOB	Leave no-one behind
MEP	Ministry of Economy and Planning

MFP	Ministry of Finance and Prices
MINAG	Ministry of Agriculture
MINCEX	Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
MTSS	Ministry of Labour and Social Security
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
ONEI	National Office of Statistics and Information
PADIT	Articulated Platform for Integrated Local Development
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PNDES 2030	National Economic and Social Development Plan 2030
PROFET	Programme of vocational training of young people and workers in technical and vocational education in selected specialties for their insertion into employment
RBLAC	Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSC	South-South cooperation
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNS	United Nations Secretariat
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USA	United States of America
VTE	Vocational technical education
VUINEX	Single Window for Foreign Investment
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Evaluation Brief: Cuba

Cuba’s socio-political landscape is characterized by its socialist model of government and a planned development approach in an upper-middle-income economy. The country has achieved a high level of human development as a result of social policies, high literacy rates and universal access to the public health system. However, it currently faces significant socio-economic challenges. The economy’s heavy reliance on tourism and remittances has made it vulnerable to external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, in a context exacerbated by the prevailing external sanctions. Key objectives in achieving sustainable development include improving access to energy, boosting economic diversification, resilience to climate change, and managing phenomena such as migration and an ageing population.

The UNDP country programme for 2020-2024 was aligned with Cuba’s National Economic and Social Development Plan 2030 (PNDES 2030). UNDP leveraged its strengths in technical and operational support for public policy implementation. The programme’s design addressed four major outcomes: progress in the decentralization process; enhanced economic productivity; enhanced natural resources protection, climate resilience and disaster risk management; and improved access to quality public services and social protection systems, particularly for vulnerable populations.

FIGURE 1: Programme expenditure by thematic area, 2020-2023

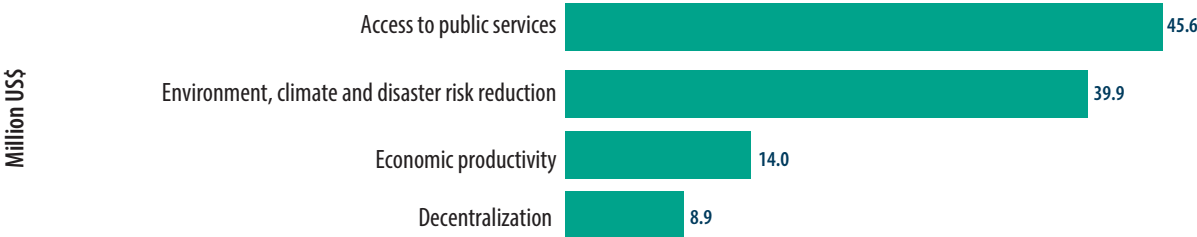
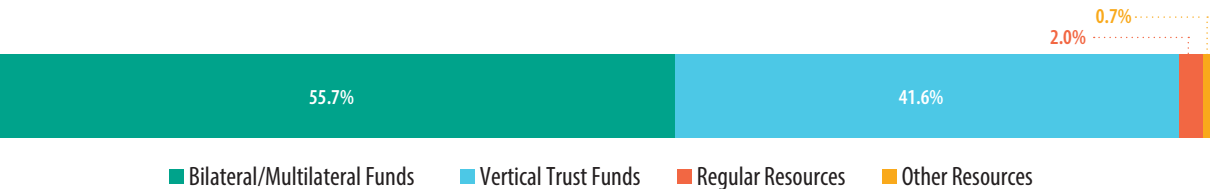


FIGURE 2: Country programme funding sources, 2020-2023



Source: UNDP IEO

Findings and conclusions

The evaluation underscored the consistency of UNDP’s programme with previous cycles and its role as a trusted partner for Cuba, recognized for its technical rigour and operational effectiveness. UNDP’s swift, innovative and adaptive responses, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of natural disasters, solidified its credibility as a development partner. UNDP contributed to strengthening local governance and productive transformation, reinforcing the country’s decentralization process, strengthening information systems and fostering digital transformation. It articulated a relevant and

far-reaching portfolio on sustainable management of natural ecosystems, climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Progress was made in expanding rights and reducing barriers in relation to human rights and gender, which limited health access for vulnerable populations.

While the evaluation underlined how the different challenges faced by Cuba in this cycle reinforced the relevance of UNDP interventions, the complex socio-economic national context slowed down the potential impact of work to strengthen agricultural value chains and modernize the banking system. The evaluation also identified the need to continue strengthening capacity at the subnational level for effective policy implementation at the local level, as well as the need to continue mobilizing resources to complement national co-financing, as evidenced in the area of health. The challenging energy situation highlighted the importance of accompanying the energy transition and promoting less carbon-intensive economic development, which will require scale and funding far beyond those currently seen in UNDP projects.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation 1: UNDP should further promote digital transformation and mobilize financing for development in Cuba, working on greater inter-institutional and multilevel collaboration involving key ministries to support the country in the progress towards the achievement of PNDES 2030 targets and the SDGs. UNDP should place special emphasis on information systems, statistics, results-based management tools and the application of multidimensional methodologies to support decision-making and with a focus on key social policies.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should leverage its strategic positioning and knowledge in terms of local development and productive transformation in the country in support of the government economic productivity agenda, considering existing capacity and area-based comparative advantages, to maximize the results and impacts of its interventions.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should further support the transition to a resilient and less carbon-intensive energy model for Cuba, leveraging both its capacity to attract development funding and its experience in promoting renewable energy infrastructure.

Recommendation 4: In the areas of climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction, UNDP should continue promoting initiatives aimed at the rational and sustainable management of water resources, reinforcing water quality monitoring systems, and expanding the scope of its support for seismic risk prevention.

Recommendation 5: UNDP should leverage its convening capacity and the accumulated experience in the Cuban health sector, resulting from its extensive collaboration with Cuban authorities, key actors and the Global Fund, to strengthen and modernize other strategic areas of the national health system.

Recommendation 6: UNDP should further strengthen the gender mainstreaming capacity of its staff and take advantage of new public policy opportunities to accelerate closing the gender gap, dismantle the structural causes of gender inequalities and prevent and respond to gender-based violence. UNDP should strengthen the use of the rights-based approach, update metrics, and consider intersectionality with other population groups at risk of being left behind, at all stages of the programme cycle.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT



1.1 Purpose, objective and scope of the evaluation

Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) compile evaluative evidence to demonstrate the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) contributions to development results at the country level, assessing the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts to achieve development results. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy¹.

The objective of an ICPE is twofold: to strengthen UNDP accountability to national stakeholders and to its Executive Board, and to promote evidence-based learning to feed into the development of the new country programme.

This is the second country-level evaluation conducted in the Republic of Cuba² by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). This ICPE covered UNDP work implemented under the umbrella of the 2020-2024 Country Programme Document (CPD), up to October 2023. The scope of the ICPE includes the UNDP programme in its entirety, from all funding sources including resources from UNDP, donors and the Government of Cuba. The ICPE also reviewed interventions that started in the previous programme cycle and continued into the current one, as per the evaluation terms of reference (Annex 1).

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE is guided by four main evaluation questions (see Box 1). Among other areas of focus, the ICPE has paid close attention to how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of the planned country programme, and the extent to which the UNDP response to the pandemic contributed to the Government's relief and recovery efforts. The ICPE presents findings, conclusions and recommendations, which will provide input into the development of the next UNDP CPD for Cuba.

The primary audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Cuba country office, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC), the UNDP Executive Board, and the Government of Cuba. The evaluation is also expected to be used by other United Nations agencies and development stakeholders in the country as input to their evaluation work.

The ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process and methodology (see the evaluation framework in Annex 2) and it adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards³. At the start of the evaluation, together with the UNDP country office, the team identified and validated the list of all the projects within the programme cycle that would form the basis for the evaluation (see the complete project list in Annex 3). This was followed by a desk review of key country context data; the review of reference material, including country programme strategies, project and programme

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, ultimately, the sustainability of results?
-

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

² See the IEO's first Cuba ICPE (2019) here: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/cuba.shtml>

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

documents, monitoring reports, audits and evaluations (see the full list of documentation in Annex 4); and a stakeholder analysis (see the full list of stakeholders consulted in Annex 5). The evaluation sought balanced representation of the different types of actors involved in the programme, including government officials, implementing partners, beneficiary groups, United Nations agencies, and other development partners from donor organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia.

The evaluation employed a rating system to assess the performance of the country programme, using five internationally agreed evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability (OECD-DAC, 2020)⁴. The relevance and coherence of the UNDP country programme were assessed in relation to key national development policies and strategies, changes in the national context and the interventions of other international actors in the country. UNDP capacity to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities was also considered. The effectiveness of the programme assessed progress towards expected outputs, and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the intended CPD outcomes. Efficiency assessed the extent to which results were obtained in an economic and timely manner. Sustainability assessed the likelihood of net benefits continuing after the interventions. The ICPE examined specific factors across all criteria that influenced the programme both positively and negatively. The country programme performance rating results can be found in Annex 6.

The evaluation relied on information collected from different sources, and this was triangulated before the final analysis. Sources included:

- A review of key country context data and UNDP documentation on projects and programmes, audit reports, decentralized evaluations, research papers and other country-related publications.⁵
- A comprehensive preliminary questionnaire was sent by IEO to the UNDP country office in July 2023. The results of the programme cycle reported there were discussed and cross-checked during the field mission in October 2023.
- The evaluation team conducted field visits in locations that had been sites of implementation of different projects in different thematic areas. These were Artemisa, Pinar del Rio, Villa Clara, Sancti Spíritus and Ciego de Avila.
- An analysis of the programme outcomes and outputs, the status of its indicators (Annex 7), and the underlying theories of change, and a mapping of implemented projects against the goals set in the CPD. A Geographical Information System analysis complemented the data collection (Annex 8).
- Focus groups and semi-structured interviews of 108 stakeholders (54 percent of whom were women) were held to collect data, assess perceptions on the scope and effectiveness of programme interventions, determine factors affecting performance, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

In line with UNDP Gender Equality Strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming across the country programme and operations. UNDP gender markers enabled the tracking of resource allocations for gender equality in the programme. The IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) was used to implement a gender-responsive analysis of programme results⁶. Where possible, sex-disaggregated data were collected and assessed against programme outcomes.

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

⁵ Thirteen decentralized evaluations were conducted in the period under review. The quality assessment of one report was 'satisfactory', seven were 'moderately satisfactory', two were 'moderately unsatisfactory', and three have not been rated. Evaluation reports are available at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/units/196?status=2>

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

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

1.3 Evaluation challenges and limitations

The evaluation team experienced logistical limitations due to fuel restrictions affecting the entire country in 2023. While the fuel shortages limited the ability of the evaluation team to travel to Cuba's eastern-most regions, cooperation with the country office and provincial and municipal authorities enabled travel to the country's central regions. Travel to one remote area to visit hard-to-reach communities benefiting from renewable energy projects had to be suspended due to roads being impassable from adverse weather. These constraints reduced the possibilities for the direct observation of results and direct interaction with beneficiaries. The exclusion of the most difficult-to-access areas may have generated positive biases in the findings. However, to mitigate this the evaluation team expanded interviews and collected additional secondary information in the form of graphic or audiovisual evidence of project results when possible.

1.4 Country context

The Republic of Cuba is an archipelago with a population of 10.05 million in 2023⁷. The main island is the largest in the Caribbean Sea, located to the south of Florida, United States of America (USA), and west of the Republic of Haiti. The 2019 Constitution reaffirmed Cuba as a socialist state and a unitary and indivisible republic. Its socialist economic system has established a planned direction for the economy and state ownership of the means of production. Cuba has a one-party political system, in which the Communist Party of Cuba is the only official party.

Despite the significant economic challenges, Cuba remained an upper-middle-income country, ranked 85th in the Human Development Index for 2023/2024, in the high human development category⁸. With an average of 10.5 years of schooling and a life expectancy at birth of 78.2 years for all citizens, in 2022 Cuba surpassed many nations with comparable gross national income (GNI) per capita⁹. In terms of health, Cuba received World Health Organization (WHO) validation for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis in 2015. Nevertheless, HIV in Cuba is on a steady increase, particularly among men¹⁰. Cuba's achievement in developing COVID-19 vaccines was a model for other developing countries¹¹.

The Cuban economy has been severely affected by the sanctions imposed by the USA in the form of an economic embargo, which began in 1958. Because of the effects on the country, the United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly adopted resolutions calling for this to be lifted¹². Since 2020, Cuba has been in a deep economic crisis, prompting one of the most significant macroeconomic adjustments in decades. The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected tourism, a key sector in the Cuban economy. In 2023, tourism showed some

⁷ Data from the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) as of December 31, 2023.

⁸ UNDP, 'Human Development Report 2023/2024.'

⁹ Ibidem. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CUB>

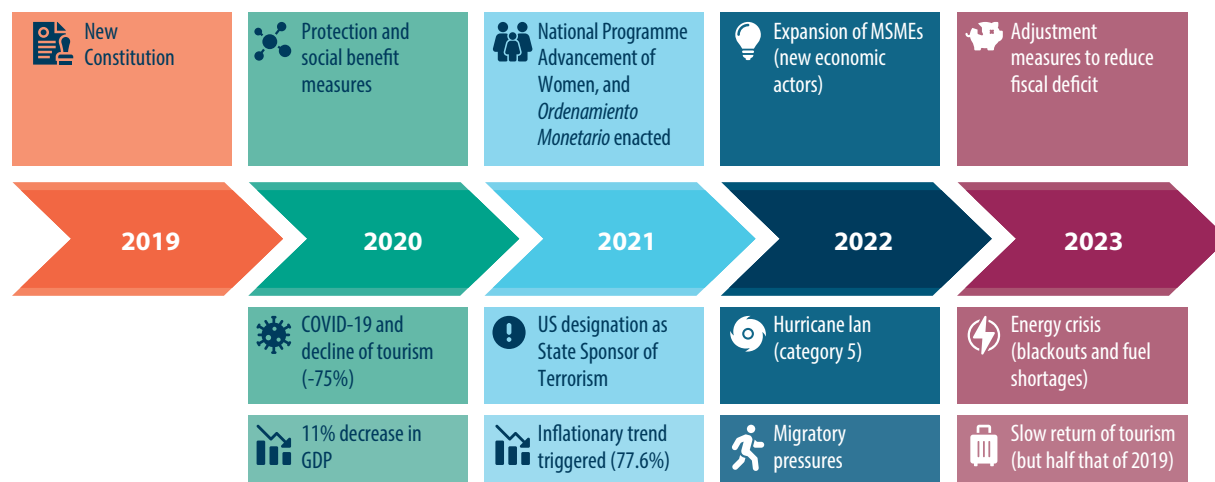
¹⁰ UNAIDS. The Key Populations Atlas <https://kpatlas.unaids.org/dashboard>

¹¹ Pan American Health Organization. <https://www.paho.org/journal/en/articles/equity-and-cuban-national-health-systems-response-covid-19-0-model-report/>; Wylie, L.L. (2021), "Cuba's response to COVID-19: lessons for the future", Journal of Tourism Futures, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 356-363. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-10-2020-0187>

¹² The last resolution titled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba" (document A/78/L.5) was adopted on 2 November 2023 by a recorded vote of 187 in favour, two against, and one abstention.

signs of recovery with 2.4 million international visitors recorded, but that only represents 42.8 percent of the pre-pandemic figures in 2019¹³. In addition, the USA's designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 2021 further hindered its inclusion in international trade and financial operations, and its ability to attract foreign direct investment (FDI)¹⁴. A new monetary system, in conjunction with pre-existing macroeconomic and structural imbalances, triggered a generalized inflationary trend. At the beginning of 2024, a new set of actions designed to reduce the fiscal deficit was put in place, which included increasing the cost of gasoline, electricity and liquefied natural gas.

FIGURE 3: Timeline of relevant public policies and contextual factors, 2019-2023



Source: IEO

The 2019 Constitution establishes that all people have the right to healthy and adequate food (article 77). According to the World Food Programme (WFP), Cuba spends US\$1.7 billion annually on food imports, constituting around 70 percent of total consumption.¹⁵ The country's dependence on imported essential food items remains a major development challenge, which has been intensified in recent years due to the complex international context and its effects on food and fuel global prices.¹⁶

In recent years, there has been a rapid acceleration of pre-existing migration trends among Cubans. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) reported that between 2015 and 2020, there was a 17 percent rise in the Cuban emigrant population. Migration trends also showed that the number of Cubans leaving the country and crossing through Honduras irregularly had increased by 1,306 percent between 2021 and 2022, rising to a total of 73,681 crossings.¹⁷

¹³ Data from ONEI, 2023.

¹⁴ CEPAL, 2023. *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean*.

¹⁵ WFP (2021) Executive Board, Annual session. https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000134180

¹⁶ This includes disruptions in the global supply chain, the climate crisis and the war in Ukraine.

¹⁷ IOM, Regional Data Hub, 2023, Migration trends in the Americas. <https://gmdac.iom.int>

Cuba had a Gender Development Index score of 0.96 in 2021—bringing it close to achieving gender parity in three basic dimensions of human development.¹⁸ However, on the negative side, UN Women data indicate that in 2018, 4.6 percent of women aged 15–49 years had experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. In addition, statistics show an unequal distribution of household responsibilities, with women and girls aged over 15 dedicating 21 percent of their time to unpaid care and domestic work, compared to the figure for men of 12.5 percent.¹⁹

Cuba has a tropical climate and rich biodiversity, but like other Caribbean nations it is heavily impacted by climate change, evident in prolonged droughts, elevated sea levels, warmer ocean waters and increasingly intense storms. Between 2012 and 2022, Cuba accounted for 78 percent of all new internal human displacements recorded in the Caribbean region, mostly due to natural hazards.²⁰ Hurricane Ian (2022) and Hurricane Idalia (2023) caused significant damage. Cuba actively engages in global initiatives to address climate change, having ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 and submitting its first Nationally Determined Contribution in 2020. This outlined the country’s climate change adaptation and mitigation policies and measures, with a focus on land-use sectors including energy, agriculture and forestry.²¹ Despite the aim to increase renewable sources of energy to 37 percent by 2030, in 2021 the largest source of energy was oil (79 percent), followed by biofuels (14 percent) and natural gas (6 percent). Only 0.4 percent was supplied by wind, solar and hydro.²²

1.5 UNDP in Cuba

Cuba formalized its partnership with UNDP in 1973. Over the last 50 years, UNDP has supported Cuba in a wide range of areas, including health, productive transformation, human development with equity, women’s economic empowerment, sustainability, biodiversity, climate change adaptation (CCA), resilience and disaster risk reduction.²³ The previous ICPE (2019) concluded that UNDP had played a pivotal role in strengthening national capacity for decentralized development; supported the implementation of the Cuban energy policy framework, banking modernization and the response to HIV and AIDS; and fostered inter-institutional collaboration.²⁴

The current country programme (2020-2024) was aligned with Cuba’s National Economic and Social Development Plan 2030 (PNDES 2030).²⁵ The programme’s focus is on government effectiveness, productive transformation, natural resources, environment and energy, and health and human development (Figure 4). The programme design was guided by the corporate-level UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, as well as selected priority areas in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Cuba 2020-2024, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

¹⁸ UNDP, 2024. <https://hdr.undp.org/gender-development-index#/indicies/GDI>

¹⁹ UN Women, 2024. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/cuba>

²⁰ https://rosanjose.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11446/files/documents/2023-12/en_tendencias_marzo_junio_2023_vf_.pdf

²¹ UNFCCC. NDC registry. <https://unfccc.int/NDCREG>

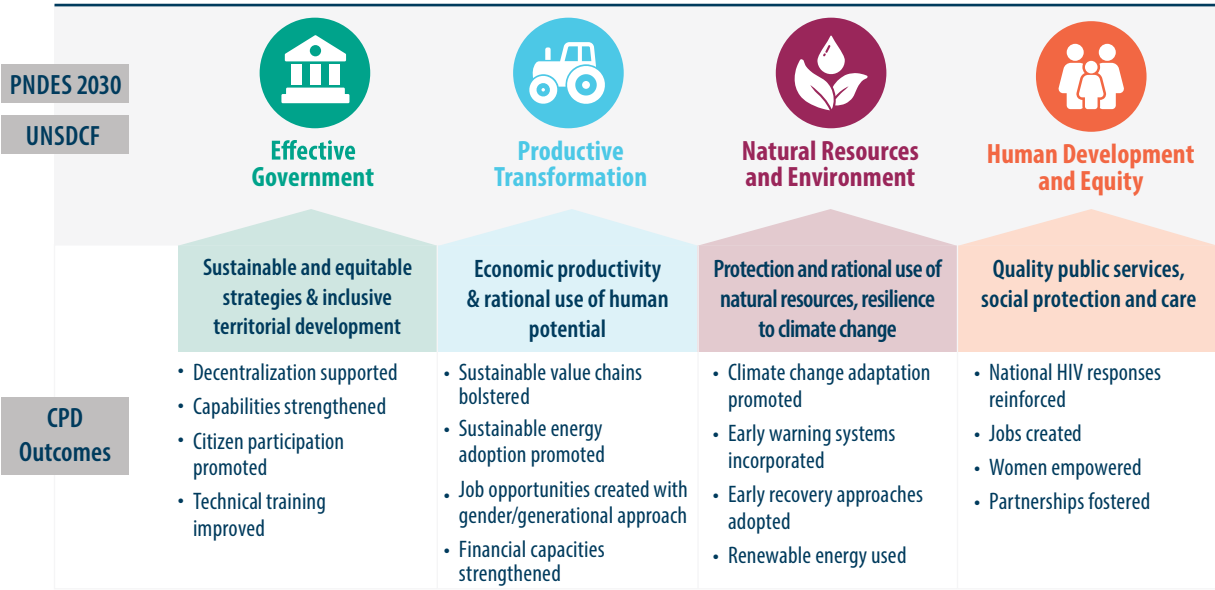
²² International Energy Agency (IEA), 2022. <https://www.iea.org/countries/cuba/energy-mix>

²³ See more details here: <https://www.undp.org/es/cuba/PNUD-50-Cuba>

²⁴ IEO UNDP, ICPE Cuba. 2019. <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/14958>

²⁵ See: <https://www.mep.gob.cu/es/pndesods-2030/plan-nacional-de-desarrollo-economico-y-social-2030>

FIGURE 4: CPD alignment with PNDES 2030 and UNSDCF



Source: IEO

The CPD results framework was structured according to four outcomes and nine outputs: First, UNDP aimed to implement comprehensive, sustainable, equitable and inclusive local development strategies as part of the decentralization process, to support the implementation of the new Constitution. To achieve this outcome, UNDP planned to engage and strengthen the capabilities of national and local governments. New decentralized mechanisms were expected to improve citizen participation, while ensuring the effective planning, management and execution of decentralization processes. The programme also aimed to broaden local development support and improve technical training, while enhancing the national and local statistical systems through a gender-sensitive approach.

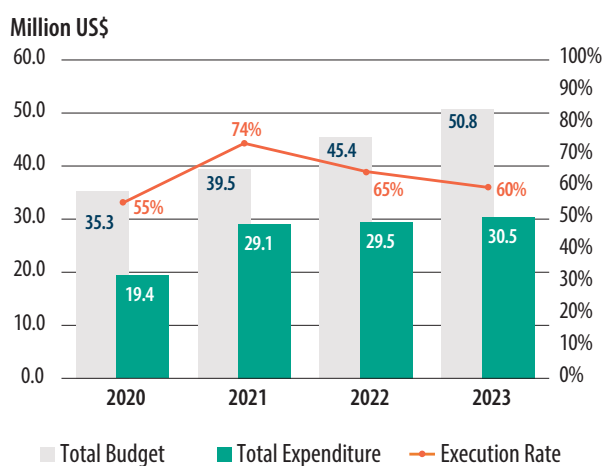
The second outcome was the achievement of higher levels of economic productivity and the rational use of human potential in key national sectors. UNDP aimed to bolster local sustainable value chains in the agrifood sector, promote sustainable energy adoption, and create job opportunities, with cross-cutting gender and generational approaches. This was also expected to strengthen the financial capacity of key institutions to expand development options.

The third outcome was the improvement of protection and rational use of natural resources and ecosystems, resilience to climate change, and comprehensive disaster risk reduction management. UNDP prioritized the incorporation of methodologies to strengthen community resilience and facilitate a proactive and early recovery approach that empowers communities. UNDP expected to restore livelihoods, harness local resources to produce building materials and create employment opportunities for the youth, and promote the use of renewable energy sources.

The fourth outcome was the improvement of access to quality public services, social protection and care systems. In line with the promotion of gender equality and human rights, part of the strategy was to integrate demographic dynamics analysis into economic and social decision-making, targeting the most vulnerable, elderly and people with disabilities, while incorporating a gender perspective. The programme aimed to contribute to the sustainability of national HIV responses, health-care system programmes and comprehensive prevention programmes for specific groups (namely LGBTIQ+).²⁶ It also aimed to promote job creation for young people through enhanced technical training aligned with local development strategies.

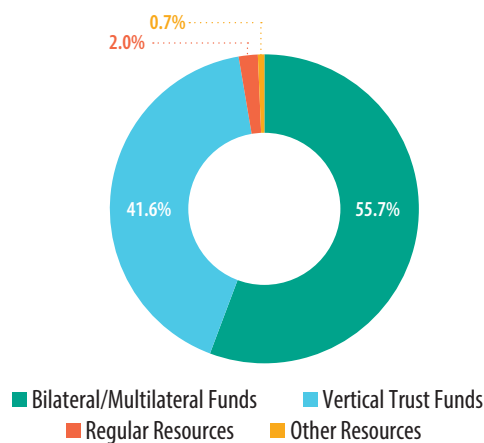
The estimated budget for the five-year CPD was \$100.7 million. Programme expenditures exceeded this figure at the end of 2023, one year before the end of the programme. Annual budgets saw steady increases from \$35 million in 2020 to more than \$50 million in 2023 (Figure 5). In terms of expenditure, after the initial year affected by COVID-19, the country office had executed close to \$30 million per year, for a total of \$108.5 million. More than half of the funds were from bilateral or multilateral sources or linked to vertical funds (Figure 6).

FIGURE 5: Programme budget and expenditure by year, 2020-2023



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

FIGURE 6: Expenditure by fund category, 2020-2023



²⁶ LGBTIQ+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer. The term groups people with such sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as the communities they form.

CHAPTER 2

FINDINGS



2.1 Strategic positioning and partnerships

Finding 1. Strategic positioning. UNDP was seen to be a trusted and strategic partner for policymakers and donors, recognized for its technical rigour and operational effectiveness. Its swift response in emergency situations reinforced this perception. UNDP sustained its focus on decentralization, the environment and health, while addressing new challenges such as the integration of new economic actors, the promotion of renewable energies or access to development financing.

Evaluation respondents from Government, donors and United Nations agencies recognized the trust that government institutions placed in UNDP during this programme cycle and its positioning as a partner of choice in economic, environmental and governance programmatic issues. Beneficiaries highlighted the opportunities to access funds and inputs made possible by UNDP, which allowed them to develop productive initiatives, as well as the support received for the organizational and legal strengthening of their organizations and networks. This trust emanates from UNDP's 50-year presence in Cuba, celebrated in 2023, together with its multilateral nature. During this programme cycle, UNDP maintained its support of the country's development priorities in a coherent manner, providing continuity to long-standing initiatives such as the Articulated Platform for Integrated Local Development (PADIT),²⁷ strengthening value chains, or the response to HIV. The alignment of the CPD and associated projects with the priorities of PNDES 2030, and the trust generated, also allowed UNDP to work on new strategic issues. These included promoting micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), attracting international financing, or strengthening statistics. Its positioning and status as a reliable 'go-to-agency' was also highlighted in the previous ICPE.

Different institutional actors highlighted the image of UNDP as an organization that provides technical rigour, identifies relevant programmatic issues and methodologies, and demonstrates efficient operational capacity and responsiveness to emergencies. The technical rigour was linked to the high technical quality of UNDP staff, and access to international experts, as demonstrated in the introduction of new socioeconomic measurement indexes, such as multidimensional poverty or the Multilevel Vulnerability Index, among other examples. Respondents, including donors, recognized that the strong operational capacity positioned the country office as a particularly effective partner for managing the procurement and importation of project goods and equipment.

Donors consulted considered UNDP a reliable partner, including for local-level work, with the operational capacity to manage large financial projects. They highlighted the good historical performance of UNDP in the use of funds allocated for health, and its capacity for dialogue with civil society organizations (CSOs). The response to COVID-19 allowed the office to demonstrate this operational capacity, which was particularly appreciated by those implementing partners without a direct presence on the island. In addition, this enabled UNDP to position itself as a partner in the promotion of digitalization, in line with its Strategic Plan. Initial contributions in this area have seen results such as the modernization of information technology in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment. Support provided to the national environment policy *Tarea Vida*, and the promotion of the use of renewable energies, have positioned UNDP as a reference actor in the field of sustainable development and climate change resilience. This was evidenced by the increase in the project portfolio, particularly with Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds, and recently accessing the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

²⁷ The PADIT started in 2014 and has been significantly supported by funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

Finding 2. Partnerships and integrator role. UNDP successfully broadened its range of partnerships in Cuba, including with a multilateral bank for the first time. Its convening capacity, promotion of inter-institutional cooperation, and support to attract development funds were widely recognized at national, subnational and local levels. UNDP support for South-South cooperation (SSC) and the exchanging of experiences with international experts continued to strengthen Cuban national capacities. While UNDP participated actively with other United Nations agencies, it could have further deepened its integrator role.

In line with the UNDP Strategic Plan, in this cycle the country office strengthened partnerships and expanded collaboration with new national actors. Given the relevance of PNDES 2030 to the CPD, the strengthening of partnerships with the Ministry of Economy and Planning (MEP), responsible for the implementation of Agenda 2030, and with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment (MINCEX), which oversees international cooperation, was particularly relevant. Work with the Cuban Central Bank (CCB), the Ministry of Finance and Prices (MFP), the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS), on issues such as green banking or data for development, was also relevant. Several sectoral partnerships were strengthened through project implementation, described further in the programme-related findings of this report. The implementation of responses to COVID-19 opened up the possibility for UNDP to position itself in the area of digital transformation of public institutions, particularly with the Ministry of Communications. Partnerships in digital transformation were established with the University of Computer Sciences of Havana, and with the Havana Science and Technology Park. In addition, UNDP broadened its scope, forming new partnerships with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Energy and Mines. Within civil society, respondents highlighted the work carried out with support networks for the response to HIV (Finding 14), and the added value of UNDP's alliances with academia supporting PADIT at the subnational level.

This cycle was marked by the partnership with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), bolstering its bond with the Cuban Central Bank. In 2022, CABEI was the first multilateral bank in over 60 years to extend a loan to Cuba, approving a loan for 46.6 million Euros to uplift the Cuban biopharmaceutical industry by enhancing and broadening the production capacities of entities within the BioCubaFarma Group. UNDP guided Cuba in designing the loan process, drawing on experience of managing the initial CABEI emergency grants to Cuba in response to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, and emergency funds in 2022 to cover damage caused by a fire at the Supertanker Base in Matanzas. These experiences highlighted the importance of an early, comprehensive review of necessary intermediary banking paperwork and a solid disbursement monitoring system.

UNDP also strengthened its alliances with cooperation partners and demonstrated its capacity to mobilize finance for development and attract vertical environmental funds for the country. During the evaluation, UNDP received a positive assessment from bilateral partners.²⁸ This highlights the implementation capacity of UNDP, reflected in the increase of projects and funds granted during this cycle. Several donors were interested in securing UNDP support for MSMEs (particularly from the European Union [EU] and Sweden), and for initiatives related to decentralization and the insertion of youth into the labour force (notably the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation [SDC]). Respondents noted that UNDP was able to manage its visibility and brand well, while achieving outreach and visibility with donors and partners. In relation to multilateral donors, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) shows continued confidence in UNDP as the Principal Recipient for Cuba, despite the lack of the anticipated national cofinancing (Finding 13). Counterparts recognized the key role of UNDP in enabling the expansion of nature, climate and energy initiatives through funding from the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Montreal Protocol Implementation Fund.

²⁸ The main partners in terms of budget support were the EU, Italy, Switzerland, Canada and Russia.

UNDP support to Cuba receiving South-South cooperation enabled the transfer of institutional best practices. The support from RBLAC thematic teams²⁹ was a significant contribution to developing exchanges with other country offices in the region, including Mexico, Chile and the Dominican Republic. Implementation of the Support to the Formation of the Integrated National Financing Framework for the SDGs in Cuba (CIFFRA) joint programme and the Introduction to Programme Budgeting programme enabled an exchange with international cooperation experts from UNDP Mexico, which was appreciated by national counterparts.

UNDP played a very active role in the United Nations country team. However, given the scope and size of its programme and it being the biggest among UN agencies in the country, some stakeholders expected a larger integrator role. UNDP led two UNSDCF outcome groups: Sustainability and Environmental Risks, and Effective Governance, and provided significant substantive support to cross-cutting groups on gender, programming, monitoring and evaluation, and communications. It also participated in four joint projects, two as the lead agency: Energy Efficiency (FRELocal) with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and Environmental Finance with the United Nations Environment Programme. UNDP is also implementing the Country Partnerships Programme to support the implementation of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification and Drought, jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Operationally, UNDP supported the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and most country team agencies. Despite this active role, several respondents highlighted the opportunity for UNDP to expand its integrator role, replicating at national level the integration efforts made at subnational level, to maximize the added value of the various United Nations agencies and other cooperation actors. It was noted that there was room for UNDP to further leverage the different technical competencies of other agencies.

²⁹ In particular: governance; nature; climate and energy; disaster risk reduction and recovery; and HIV, health and development.

2.2 Outcome 1. Decentralization

CPD Outcome 1: National and local governments and institutions implement comprehensive, sustainable, equitable and inclusive territorial development strategies within the framework of the decentralization process.

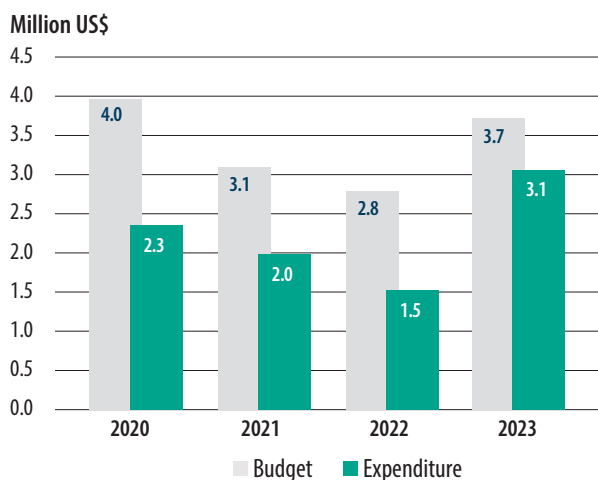
Related outputs:

OUTPUT 1.1: Strengthened capacities of national and local government and institutions to plan, manage and implement decentralization processes based on citizen participation.

OUTPUT 1.2: Strengthened capacities of the national and territorial statistical and information system, applying an innovative, gender-sensitive approach disaggregated by sex, age and geographical location in support of the update of the economic and social model and the monitoring of the SDGs.

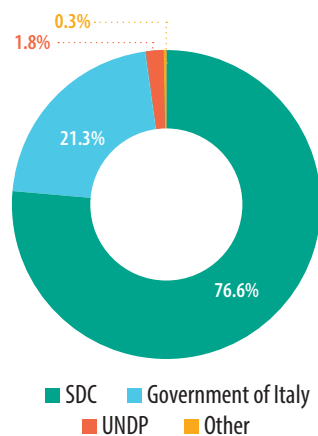
Under outcome 1, UNDP implemented 11 projects, with a total budget of \$13.6 million for the first four years (see Figure 7 for annual breakdown). Expenditure amounted to \$8.9 million, representing a 70 percent execution rate. The execution rate was a result of implementation difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In terms of funding sources, the main donor was SDC, donating \$6.8 million, which represented more than three-quarters of total expenditure and a key partner in this area of work since 2014. The two other donors supporting the decentralization process promoted under this outcome were the Government of Italy and UNDP (Figure 8).

FIGURE 7: Outcome 1: Budget and expenditure by year



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

FIGURE 8: Outcome 1: Expenditure by donor



Finding 3. Decentralization and local development. Through the PADIT platform, UNDP facilitated local development planning and execution, a vital aspect of the country's decentralization efforts. PADIT has transitioned from a development project to becoming an institutionalized public policy scaled-up to the national level. The project succeeded in convening local stakeholders to localize sectoral policies, positioning UNDP at the centre of local development initiatives. Its implementation revealed the important need for further development of subnational capacity to fully realize decentralization, including effectively transferring competencies, functions and resources.

UNDP contributed to a key framework for local development management in the country, which is a very important part of the national drive for decentralization. Its previous work on PADIT was institutionalized through the PNDES 2030 component Macro-programme 1: Government, Institutionalization and Macroeconomy.³⁰ The relevance of PADIT was reinforced in the 2019 Constitution, which recognized the principle of municipal autonomy, advocated for the expansion of the decision-making power of municipalities, and created a legal basis for the promotion and realization of local development. During the current programme cycle, Government Decree 33 for the Strategic Management of Territorial Development (2021) and its implementing regulations created Territorial Development Directorates at provincial and municipal levels, to promote local development and reduce geographical inequalities.

Through PADIT, UNDP provided a framework for the creation and formalization of subnational partnerships for national and international partners. This contribution positioned UNDP as a key actor in the design and implementation of public policies at the subnational level. The theory of change proposed that, with enhanced local adaptive capacity, better use would be made of local knowledge and resource mobilization, leading to more agile response mechanisms at the local level. To enhance local capacities, a key determining factor in this process was the involvement of the Cuban network of universities, which has a presence in all provinces of the country, and made access to knowledge and the training of local actors possible. This has proven to be good practice and is a key element for local adaptation and sustainability of the model. This governance framework is an example of innovation in Cuba. Respondents noted a high level of national ownership, using terms such as 'multistakeholder' or 'multilevel approach', which are concepts that have not been part of the traditional political language of the country.

In terms of scope, this programme cycle saw the scale-up of PADIT to cover the entire country. All provinces and municipalities implemented a decentralized model of local development management, including new tools for strengthening disaster risk management and tools and training for gender-responsive local management and planning.³¹ Documents and field observations showed that leadership and priority were given to the implementation at the provincial level. A contributing factor to this focus on provinces was the fact that not all municipalities had a homogeneous level of installed capacity, nor the same levels of locally available human resources. Interprovincial staff exchanges enabled knowledge transfer and the replication of best practices.

PADIT has been more effective in promoting initiatives for local economic development than in its capacity to promote local social development. UNDP provided support to improve the sources of income of 4,137 people through local development projects (63 percent women and 61 percent youth). In line with the national priority to promote food production, PADIT supported initiatives for processing fruit and vegetables and fish, meat and dairy products in 24 municipalities, which produced an average of 50 tons of food per

³⁰ The VII Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, held in April 2016, approved the foundations of PNDES 2030, established development priorities and initiated implementation. The new government workplan, based on the strategic axes of the PNDES 2030, is set out in six macro-programmes.

³¹ The trainings reached a total of 4,116 local stakeholders (of which 2,224 were women). They targeted subnational development management and ran parallel to the launch of the toolkit incorporated into the national regulations for decentralization and financing for local development, and the design of a roadmap for the transfer of four 'SDG Value Chains' methodologies to promote MSMEs.

day, benefiting some 800,000 people.³² UNDP encouraged innovation by promoting new forms of financing, such as granting microloans to MSMEs, and greater use of information communication technologies (ICT). It supported the launch of the PADIT website, the creation of 155 municipal websites and the development of 98 local governments' communication strategies.

Progress in UNDP's work on decentralization to date is in line with initial phases of a full decentralization process, which ultimately aims to bring decision-making and responsiveness closer to the people. This progress shows that UNDP has contributed to building a solid foundation through its work on institutionalizing the decentralization process, but additional steps are needed to develop local decentralization competencies. UNDP supported the Roadmap for the Decentralization of Competencies in Cuba, which highlighted the need for a Municipalities Law and defined competencies at the local level. As a result, a subnational capacity-building programme was formulated and led by the University Network of Innovation and Knowledge Management for Local Development, a network composed of more than 15 provincial stakeholders, including think tanks, universities and local CSOs. This programme covers a number of issues at the local level, including skill development strategies, production systems and models, local development projects, the promotion of a business environment and development financing. Stakeholders identified opportunities as a future focus, such as the need to promote citizen participation practices, the creation of a National Development Fund to promote local development, and the challenge of strengthening intermunicipal policies.

Finding 4. Data for development. UNDP provided Cuba with tools and metrics for measuring poverty and vulnerability. These contributed to evidence-based management, and an emerging change in the framing of discussions on public policy which seek to complement traditional approaches of universality with policies targeted at specific populations. Challenges do persist, such as the inertia of the vertical planning model, limited interoperability between sectoral statistical information systems, and the lack of ownership of mechanisms for localization of the SDGs.

Sustainable human development requires robust statistics to help identify gaps and vulnerabilities at the community level. UNDP's work in this area was relevant this cycle. UNDP provided support to establish new metrics to measure poverty and vulnerability, as well as institutional performance, although this was hindered by the lack of data and capacity to capture the information required. This included the development of methodological tools that catalysed opportunities to shift the national approach to public policy from the current universalist social protection model that is mostly focused on policy products, to a new model that focuses more on people and key populations. The tools were designed to strengthen data for planning at the municipal and provincial levels. Although the scope of the contribution was small, the potential is high, and fully consistent with the work on decentralization and local development. This is because local capacity for strategic management depends on the availability of quality and timely data.

During this cycle and with UNDP support, Cuba applied the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) methodology for the first time, joining 102 other countries in the Global MPI Report, coordinated by the UNDP Human Development Report Office and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. A national methodology was approved for the MPI calculation process, and the first national survey was prepared. The work was led by the National Office of Statistics and Information with the advice and assistance of the UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative global technical team. The results are expected to be published in 2024. The methodology and approach are innovative instruments for monitoring public policy and giving attention to vulnerable groups and which potentially enable the government to identify vulnerable families in need of attention.

³² UNDP Cuba, 2022. Annual Report. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/PNUD-Cuba-Resultados-2022-20mb-1.5.pdf>

UNDP provided support for the generation of data for development in different sectoral areas, helped by its capacity to establish partnerships with national counterparts. UNDP supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Social and Labour Observatory to design the first Multilevel Vulnerability Index in the country, as well as to carry out a data collection pilot in 21 vulnerable communities, with complementary contributions from WFP on components relating to food and nutritional security. The index was designed to facilitate the identification of types of vulnerabilities at the community, household and individual level.³³ UNDP supported the National Institute of Land Use and Urban Planning (INOTU) to develop a Territorial Development Index (TDI) covering all 168 municipalities in the country. This enabled the Institute to identify economic, social and environmental inequalities. The index made it possible to identify the proportion of housing in fair or poor condition within each municipality and to identify trends and observe population dynamics.³⁴ With the University of Havana Centre for Demographic Studies (CEDEM), and technical assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 15 socio-demographic observatories were created to analyse population dynamics to inform local policymaking.

Another key area of UNDP support focused on the promotion of the SDGs and the generation of data for monitoring them. However, there was limited effectiveness in attempts to make the SDGs included in decision-making. The SDG Lab digital tool was designed with UNDP support and transferred to the National SDG Group, led by the Ministry of Economy and Planning and selected local governments. However, it was not well appropriated by civil society and the tool still requires the expansion of the number and scope of its initiatives. Respondents acknowledged that it has been a challenge to coordinate the engagement of different actors and promote effective strategic coordination to advance the achievement of the SDGs in the country. Through the implementation of CIFFRA, the objectives of PNDES 2030 were aligned with the SDGs, and 70 experts from 23 national institutions were trained in development finance for the SDGs in four workshops.

Although the different indices developed and supported by UNDP provided relevant approaches, they could have been better integrated and linked. The need to strengthen digital transformation in public institutions to ensure better data and more effective information processes, improve decision-making processes and inform citizens became clear during this programme cycle. The complexity of improving indicator systems, and data collection and processing to measure trends in national and local development was also identified. In this regard, UNDP ended this programme cycle well positioned to promote dialogue and intersectoral integration, and to encourage greater synergy between the key ministries involved in Macro-programme 1 of PNDES 2030. This integration could potentially strengthen efforts to generate, capture and use data. The implementation of multidimensional tools for assessing impact and the levels of poverty requires sustained efforts to transition from pilot to established systems which can enhance public policies. Respondents underscored how the improvement of local statistics, inter-institutional coordination, and the digitalization of government services are crucial for better governmental decision-making.

³³ Analysing economic, labour, socio-educational, health, habitat and institutional vulnerabilities.

³⁴ The comparative analysis of the TDI showed positive performance in the municipalities of Matanzas province, associated with a decrease in people living in precarious neighbourhoods and an increase in the volume of investment per capita. In contrast, the provinces of Villa Clara, Camagüey and Las Tunas required special attention.

2.3 Outcome 2. Economic productivity

CPD Outcome 2: Nationally prioritized strategic sectors achieve higher levels of economic productivity and rational use of human potential.

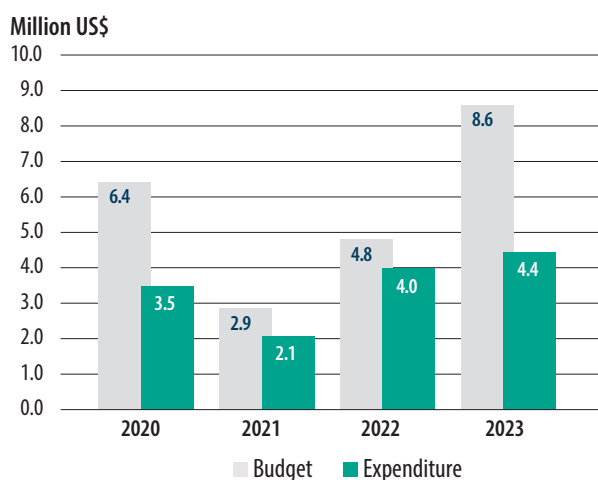
Related outputs:

OUTPUT 2.1: Strengthened local sustainable value chains in priority sectors, with emphasis on agrifood sectors for self-sufficiency, and mechanisms in place for cross-sectoral integration, sustainable energy use and improved job quality, with gender and generational equity.

OUTPUT 2.2: Strengthened capacities of key institutions and actors to manage financing in support of the development of priority sectors, including foreign direct investment.

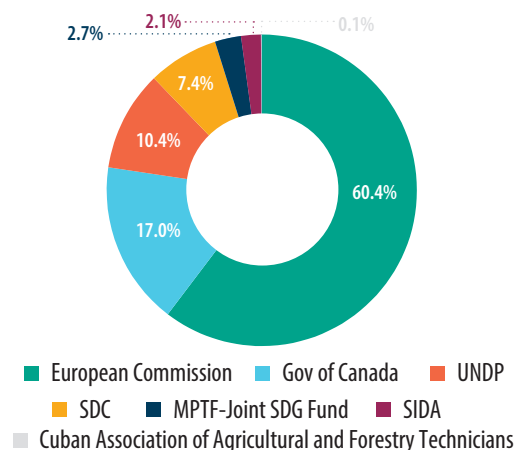
Outcome 2 was comprised of 14 projects of varying sizes, with a total budget of \$22.7 million and total expenditure of \$14 million (see Figure 9 for the annual breakdown). This resulted in a delivery rate of 62 percent to the end of 2023. This relatively low figure was a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and lower-than-expected expenditure on the Global Action against Climate Change: Municipality of Martí project. Three projects under National Implementation Modality accounted for 80 percent of total expenditure for this outcome.³⁵ In terms of funding sources, the main donor for this outcome was the European Commission, with almost \$8.5 million expended to date, followed by Canada, UNDP, SDC and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (see Figure 10).

FIGURE 9: Outcome 2: Budget and expenditure by year



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

FIGURE 10: Outcome 2: Expenditure by donor



³⁵ ALASS (40%), *Agrofrutales* (25%) and BASAL (16%)

Finding 5. Sustainable value chains. UNDP supported the development of value chains by upgrading equipment and integrating sustainable practices, empowering women and local stakeholders, and providing technical assistance at policy level. Although sustainable agrifood systems are still in their initial stages, UNDP expanded the scope of its programme and results to promote productivity, sustainability and resilience in the Cuban agrifood sector, helping to mitigate the effects of the critical state of the national context.

UNDP gave continuity to successful initiatives started in previous cycles and expanded the areas of intervention to promote productivity improvement in the agrifood sector. Given that agrifood production is a national priority,³⁶ UNDP's expansion of past initiatives such as the Environmental Basis for Local Food Sustainability (BASAL) or *Agrocadenas* into new projects such as *Agrofrutales* or Local Self-Sufficiency for a Sustainable and Healthy Diet (ALASS), was particularly relevant. All these projects aligned with national objectives, including the integration of sustainable practices and the emphasis on crucial sectors for the development of self-sufficiency.

UNDP targeted interventions to improve the management, productivity and sustainability of agrifood value chains in the country, leading to increased local food production, the replacement of imports and infrastructure development. For instance, the BASAL project promoted good practices in 36 cooperatives and 10 local business units across 13 municipalities, which enabled them to contribute significantly to food production during the pandemic. The *Agrocadenas*, *Agrofrutales* and ALASS projects improved the management and productive capacity of 10 agrifood value chains, including for beans, corn, milk, beef, small livestock, mangos, guavas and papayas, and vegetables and root vegetables. These improvements were based on participatory assessments and capacity-building efforts involving over 500 local and national actors across 18 municipalities. Several infrastructure developments enhanced local capacity, including of cooperatives, through: the establishment of specialized lines for processing fruits and vegetables in some regions; the installation of the first plant for drying and processing beans in Yaguajay; and the technological modernization of the dairy industry in Sancti Spiritus.

This portfolio of projects showcased holistic approaches to sustainability and was coherent with efforts promoted in Outcome 3 on the use of natural resources. The incorporation of the 'Sustainable, Resilient and Equitable Agrifood Systems' approach strengthened economic empowerment and sustainability among local actors. Local and national capacity to incorporate this approach was strengthened through the ALASS project, which focused on municipalities procuring locally produced products and developed capacity to improve food self-sufficiency and intersectoral integration. Ninety-five local interventions benefited from the approach, as well as over 2,000 actors linked to cooperatives and local business units. The Martí project integrated circular-economy principles for long-term economic diversification and the BASAL project promoted adaptability and knowledge transfer on climate change adaptation between stakeholders.

UNDP enhanced and modernized tools and approaches for smart agriculture and fostered cross-sectoral integration. The final evaluation of the BASAL project concluded that it successfully mobilized communities and facilitated the transfer of technologies and agricultural practices for climate change adaptation. UNDP strategically implemented spaces and mechanisms for exchange and learning, resulting in the promotion and demonstration of good agricultural practices. Notable initiatives that had started in previous programmatic cycles and concluded in this one, were the establishment of 12 centres for capacity creation and knowledge management across 11 municipalities, school farms, water use and quality monitoring brigades, irrigation advisory services, and the agrometeorological and productive information network. The *Agrocadenas* project successfully implemented municipal intersectoral management councils for value chains, which led to more effective intergovernmental coordination for supply chains for mangos, papayas and guavas in the province of Artemisa. However, the specific financial impacts of this work have not yet been reported.

³⁶ The President of the Republic of Cuba has expressed the need for the country to produce more food. <https://www.granma.cu/cuba/2024-03-13/producir-mas-y-mejores-alimentos-siempre-sera-una-demanda-urgente-13-03-2024-01-03-33>

UNDP also contributed to upstream policy development through informing, developing and implementing policy changes and initiatives for economic productivity. For instance, the BASAL project influenced the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG) Strategic Plan, reflecting the role of UNDP in shaping national policies to prioritize climate-resilient practices. UNDP's collaboration with the National Soil Improvement and Conservation Programme was an example of strategic synergy and enabled the consolidation of actions across municipalities. Institutional strengthening through scientific capacity-building, technology transfer and technical services underscored the comprehensive approach of the BASAL initiative. Likewise, the ALASS project introduced nationally validated tools, such as municipal nutritional assessments and risk assessments of food value chains, which contributed to the implementation of the national Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security Law.

The effectiveness and sustainability of interventions in this area were affected by a number of factors including: a shortage of national suppliers; limited access to international suppliers; fuel shortages; high inflation; and deteriorating Euro/US\$ exchange rates. All these factors affected the potential impact of the results obtained. Although UNDP made progress in incorporating resilience approaches, sustainable agrifood systems are still in their initial stages and there is a recognized need for local governments to play a bigger role. The role of UNDP as an integrator and the achievement of better synergy with other United Nations agencies in this area fell short of expectations, with a few notable exceptions.³⁷

Finding 6. MSMEs and development finance. UNDP catalysed transformative changes in Cuba's economic and financing landscape, through initiatives supporting MSMEs, the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), and the modernization of the Cuban banking system. These initiatives marked a turning point in the country's economic trajectory, but persistent challenges will require policy refinement and further support measures.

UNDP contributed to the strengthening of institutions and actors managing financing for priority sectors, including FDI, which is aligned with Cuba's Economic and Social Policy Guidelines³⁸ and PNDES 2030. This was relevant, due to the few sources of financing for PNDES 2030. Among the strategies applied, UNDP strengthened institutional capacity through targeted training and actively engaged in the development of policies and regulations to facilitate robust financial management in priority sectors.

Different stakeholders recognized UNDP's support to MSMEs and the promotion of them as new economic actors in the country. The enactment and effective application of new legislation modifying the ownership and management structure of existing entities, such as non-agricultural cooperatives and self-employed workers introduced the MSME as a new type of economic entity for the country. It also represented a profound structural transformation in the country. Even while this initial regulatory and institutional framework was in the development stages, UNDP recognized the MSME as a key economic actor and has promoted synergy between initiatives in support of MSMEs to strengthen their integration into local economies.

Synergies achieved, for example between the ALASS project and the CIFFRA joint programme, enhanced the capacity of MSMEs associated with local food chains. This was largely through the development of a culture of collaboration and the provision of innovative and sustainable technologies for food production. The MSMEs and Entrepreneurship project was aligned with the broader goal of promoting public-private partnerships and women's empowerment. Through the development of incubation systems, the project strengthened the local institutional framework. The introduction of the SDG Value Chains programme

³⁷ For instance, the *Agrofrutales* project showcased commendable efforts in establishing sustainable partnerships. The project systematically addressed population dynamics through collaboration with UNFPA and CEDEM, notably in the papaya chain study, displaying a joint approach to critical issues. The project extended its reach through agreements, as seen with ECLAC, enriching economic and market studies for informed decision-making.

³⁸ Guideline No. 78 highlights the pivotal role of increased FDI in national development.

and On the Move training by the UNDP RBLAC benefited 107 entrepreneurs—48 of whom were women—through training in marketing and finance. The First National Fair of Incubation Experiences showcased 18 experiences and the impact of capacity-building on creating a supportive ecosystem for MSMEs.

The CIFFRA programme, led by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and implemented with the UNDP country office and the RCO in Cuba, was a prime example of active engagement in the development of financial policies. The programme resulted in a roadmap for INFF implementation,³⁹ supported by findings and over 100 policy recommendations in critical areas such as: the medium-term budgetary framework; programme-based budgeting; financing for productive transformation; attracting remittances and FDI; export promotion; strengthening financial systems; and gender awareness. With over 30 training sessions and workshops involving key government stakeholders such as the Ministry of Economy and Planning, the Ministry of Finance and Prices and the Cuban Central Bank the project highlighted the importance of strategic skills development for key actors in the financing process. This resulted in tangible inputs to decision-making. Instruments like the balance scorecard and the Medium-term Budgetary Framework signalled a shift in monitoring processes. The creation of a steering committee and technical committee for CIFFRA ensured the ownership and involvement of key government actors, fostering a strategic space for dialogue on development financing challenges. In addition, the approval by the government of a new task force for analysing innovative financial instruments demonstrated a forward-looking approach to financial management.

UNDP contributed to significant improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of critical institutions responsible for managing financing and investments in priority sectors in Cuba. Through the Support for the Modernization of the Cuban Banking System project, UNDP demonstrated a strategic approach to improving efficiency by introducing modern financial platforms. Although budget constraints limited the acquisition of advanced technologies, the project focused on knowledge transfer, fostering the use of *Eviews 9.0* software for econometric models. This approach expanded skills, particularly in the maintenance and repair of technology, evident in the Recycling ATMs initiative. The consolidation of automated bank deposits through Banco Metropolitano resulted in the extension of banking services beyond the usual banking hours. The formation of business areas in commercial banks for specialized attention to self-employed workers, and of working groups to promote and monitor new products, reflected a targeted effort for institutional effectiveness. South-South exchanges of experiences contributed to banking employees' improving their understanding of electronic banking, payment gateways and financial inclusion.

The partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment to consolidate the Single Window for Foreign Investment (VUINEX) project exemplified UNDP's impact on streamlining processes, which have led to improved transparency and timeliness. By creating a centralized platform for information exchange between potential investors and government entities, VUINEX significantly reduced governmental response times and enhanced transparency in the foreign investment process. The system facilitated permits, licences and authorizations for businesses with foreign capital, contributing to a more conducive environment for investment. Training initiatives were instrumental in consolidating the computer system supporting VUINEX operations. The project exemplified how targeted training provided by platform developers can enhance the effectiveness of operational tools, underscoring the importance of adapting training content to the specific needs of a project.

³⁹ The INFF received the '2023 United Nations SIDS Partnerships Award', which recognized its contribution to sustainable development in Small Island Developing States. https://sdgs.un.org/SIDSPartnershipsAwards#awards_2023

Respondents highlighted how efforts to promote development finance faced complex challenges which have largely persisted throughout the programme cycle. These include bureaucratic constraints and contradictory regulations; uncertainty in the monetary environment; and the need for flexible business models, greater digital adaptation and further capacity-building. Policy change processes were much slower than expected, and the access of local governments to financing opportunities remains a challenge. The national banking system offers limited credit services, requiring customization to better serve MSMEs and entrepreneurs. Respondents noted the country's readiness and commitment to address these challenges and promote development financing, which is an opportunity for UNDP to collaborate further in the next programme cycle.

2.4 Outcome 3. Ecosystems, climate change and disaster risk reduction

CPD Outcome 3: Institutions, production and service sectors, territorial governments and communities improve the protection and rational use of natural resources and ecosystems, resilience in response to climate change, and comprehensive disaster risk reduction management.

Related outputs:

OUTPUT 3.1: Strengthened capacities of key actors for sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems and improved environmental quality.

OUTPUT 3.2: Strengthened capacities of key actors for comprehensive management at national and territorial levels for disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change, incorporating gender and population perspectives.

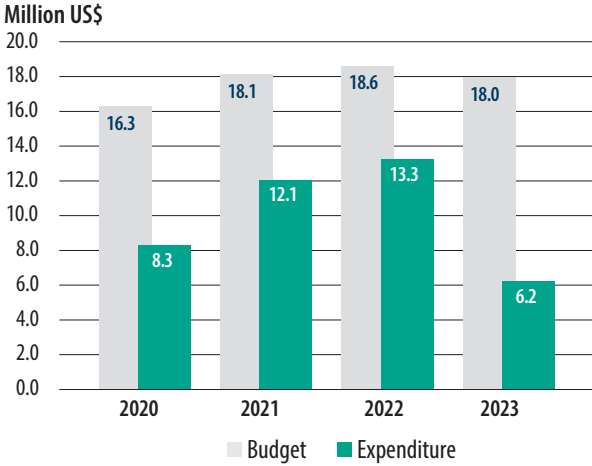
OUTPUT 3.3: Energy efficiency increased and development of renewable sources of energy promoted to help mitigate climate change, ensuring inclusive economic and social development.

OUTPUT 3.4: Strengthened capacities of key actors for disaster response and early recovery.

During this programme cycle, Outcome 3 became the largest section of the UNDP country programme in terms of budget and number of projects. With a total budget of \$71.0 million (Figure 11) spread across four programme outcomes and 37 projects, the implementation rate stood at 56 percent, the lowest among the four programme outcomes. Despite a balanced distribution of funds among the programme outputs, output 3.2 stood out, with a budget allocation of \$24.8 million, but an implementation rate of only 39 percent to date. This was mainly attributed to the slow progress of the Malecon Engineering Solutions project and the Mi Costa project being in its initial phases. In 2023, the limited level of expenditure for the procurement of equipment and goods (US\$2 million out of the planned \$10 million) lowered the execution rate.

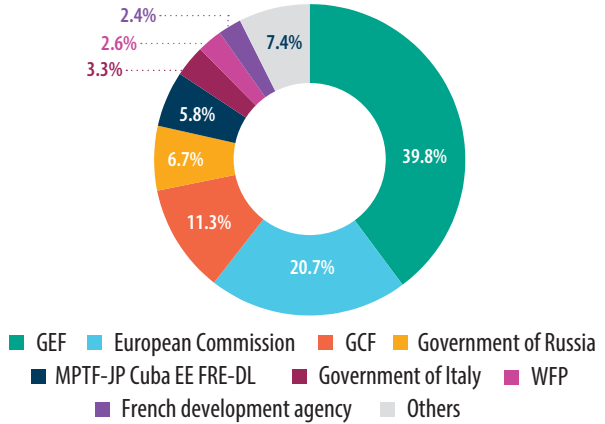
In terms of funding sources, the Global Environment Facility was the largest donor, with a contribution of \$15.9 million, followed by the European Commission, with \$8.3 million, and the Green Climate Fund, with \$4.5 million. In addition, bilateral donors, including Russia, Italy, France, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, expanded their support for this outcome (see Figure 12 for details).

FIGURE 11: Outcome 3: Budget and expenditure by year



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

FIGURE 12: Outcome 3: Expenditure by donor



Finding 7. Sustainable management of production systems and natural ecosystems. UNDP made significant contributions to sustainable land management and the biodiversity of natural ecosystems. Contributions that stood out were those made to the reduction of soil degradation, the recovery of water recharge strips, increases in biodiversity indexes, and the formation of local institutional and community capacity. However, the link between these achievements and productivity gains in production systems was not yet evident.

In response to the need to increase the productivity of agricultural practices, UNDP strengthened overall capacity for sustainable land management. Under a theory of change which linked reductions in land degradation with increased productivity, UNDP implemented the Global Environment Facility-funded Monitoring Sustainable Land Management programme for over 10 years. UNDP reportedly strengthened the capacity of 94 key sector institutions to monitor sustainable land management projects, including through field demonstration practices, with the potential for replication and scaling up in other areas. Various sources confirmed that in the short term, an 11 percent reduction in soil degradation was achieved in relation to the established baseline. A lesson learned from this project was the need to strengthen the capacity to determine the level of impact on improving producer productivity and contributions to biodiversity conservation.

UNDP contributed to biodiversity conservation through the application of systemic conceptual approaches, such as landscapes and biological connectivity. The scope of interventions was relevant, covering four strategic mountain areas in the country: Guaniguanico Massif (in which the first biological corridor was implemented); Guamuhaya Massif; Sierra de Bamburanao, in the central region; and the Nipe-Sagua-Baracoa Mountain Range, in the eastern zone. Together they cover 13 percent of national land area, are inhabited by 878,000 people, home to 70 percent of endemic species, and contain six water recharge areas. Through work extending over this programme cycle and the previous cycle, 20,440 hectares (ha.) of land have been reforested, including 581.5 ha. of water recharge areas; nine protected areas have been established in biological connectivity zones; and 774 people (132 of whom are women) have been trained in the management of protected areas with a landscape approach. In addition, UNDP’s Landscape Approach Mountain Ecosystems project contributed to national reports on biodiversity and spatial management of species, thanks to more than 8,000 records of 902 species of flora and fauna.

During this cycle, UNDP also aimed to strengthen the nexus between conservation and sustainable production in Cuba and formulated a new pilot project on sustainable tourism in the provinces of Matanzas and Ciego de Avila, which was financed by the Global Environment Facility. The project sought to bring together the variables of conservation, adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction. However, as it has only been recently formulated, there were no results to assess.

Some structural challenges in relation to the sustainability of the approaches and the results obtained so far with UNDP support were identified, including insufficient institutional capacity-building and the difficulty of sustaining demonstrative processes in the field. Institutions would have benefited from having more capacity to measure and report on results achieved and their impact.

Finding 8. Financial mechanisms for an environmental paradigm shift. By creating the conditions for the mobilization of national and international financial resources, UNDP contributed to the adoption of adaptation, mitigation and conservation practices by public and private actors. The under-capitalization of the domestic financial system and carbon sequestration measurement standards were identified as challenges to the sustainability of built capacity.

UNDP was timely and strategic in its support to create the institutional conditions for the design and implementation of incentive mechanisms for environmental services. This is a first for Cuba. Their promotion during this cycle was relevant because: i) it facilitated access to resources from multilateral environmental funds; ii) it facilitated the capitalization of agricultural and industrial production units to increase their productivity; and iii) it encouraged the adoption of sustainable practices that are low in carbon emissions, thus contributing to the country's global environmental commitments.

UNDP's promotion of mechanisms for environmental finance took place in four Global Environment Facility-funded projects in this cycle. Work was done to create enabling political and institutional conditions for the incorporation of the environmental finance approach into the national financial system (BIOFIN I and II projects); for the economic valuation of environmental services (the *Ecovalor* project); and to encourage sustainable land management practices (the Financing Mechanisms in Sustainable Land Management project).

UNDP contributions enabled the mobilization of national funds and for producers to access financing mechanisms. More than \$800 million were reportedly mobilized from local productive entities, national funds (such as the National Environment Fund and the National Forestry Development Fund), and other national entities (such as the Ministry of Agriculture). Over 62,000 certified producers were reported to have access to at least one financing mechanism, such as crop insurance, credit, forestry incentives, water supply subsidies, and improved tax rates. In addition, 5,500 producers (28.1 percent of whom were women) received technical assistance and/or visited demonstration farms to learn about sustainable land management. 20,800 ha. of forest ecosystems were reforested and soil erosion rates in selected areas were reduced.

In relation to the creation of enabling conditions at the political-institutional level, the Roadmap for the Integration of Environmental Financial Mechanisms into National Public Policies was formulated, and the methodology for the operation of the National Environmental Fund and the regulations for the payment of incentives for the removal of forest carbon were developed. UNDP also supported the formulation of six laws and 20 legal instruments to implement the strategy for financial incentives (global environmental benefits) based on the economic valuation of ecosystem goods and services. At the local level, UNDP also supported the planning of municipal governments and sectoral institutions.

Despite the evident momentum in environmental finance during this cycle, these initiatives faced sustainability challenges. Respondents highlighted two main challenges for the consolidation and sustainability of the capacity created with UNDP support. First, in relation to the country's macroeconomic conditions, the banking system and national funds were undercapitalized for the management of the financial instruments that had been designed. Second, there is the need for a consolidated methodology to measure carbon sequestration by economic actors which meets international standards.

Finding 9. Scientific knowledge and international protocols. UNDP supported the production of scientific data and statistical information for decision-making in institutions responsible for sustainable management and CCA. UNDP facilitated Cuba's compliance with global goals and commitments such as the Montreal Protocol and the Stockholm Convention. The digital transformation of the environmental sector was identified as an area of great potential for future collaboration.

The strengthening of information systems and the production of scientific knowledge for decision-making was a relevant line of work in this programme cycle. The availability of rigorous information was identified as a critical factor in achieving sectoral advances. Five projects took this approach, aiming to contribute to improved responses to extreme weather events, resilient and less carbon-intensive production practices, and enhanced conservation of biodiversity and natural systems.

Scientific research benefited from multilateral (Global Environment Facility), bilateral, and South-South cooperation support. A technical cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA) and the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security contributed to the use of genetic resources for health treatments and the monitoring and early warning of weather events on the coast of Cienfuegos.⁴⁰ Notable was a scientific finding on the potential of the seagrass species *Thalassia testudinum* for the treatment of cancer, creating the first identified opportunity in the country for the elaboration of a bioproduct of marine origin. South-South cooperation, together with China and other Latin American countries generated a new technological method for producing tolerant oleaginous yeasts for different uses. The results validated the use of microbial biomass carbohydrates as an additive in poultry and shrimp feed and a raw material for biodiesel production.

UNDP strengthened the National Environmental Information System through the inter-institutional design of environmental monitoring indicators and the integration of environmental statistics. Under the InfoGEO project, UNDP enabled the computerized interconnection of data produced by different institutions, such as the National Office of Statistics and Information, the National Institute of Hydraulic Resources (INRH) and the Ministry of Agriculture. The capacity of the Cuban Marine Forecasting System to respond to extreme weather events was also strengthened. The Marine Forecast Evaluation System software was updated, and technical training was provided. Synthetic Aperture Radars and computer equipment were provided to the Institute of Meteorology (INSMET) to process satellite images, thus allowing a daily reading of key weather forecasting variables.

Through technical assistance and capacity-building, UNDP contributed to the country's compliance with the Montreal Protocol, the Kigali Amendment and the Stockholm Convention. The programme facilitated the strengthening of Cubaenergia's capacity to phase out the import and consumption of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) in sectors including refrigeration, air conditioning, industry and general customs sectors. A 35 percent reduction of HCFCs in imported equipment and technologies was reported and this met the 67.6 percent target commitment in the Montreal Protocol. At the regulatory level, a national system for granting licences and quotas, along with good practice manuals and institutional protocols for

⁴⁰ The relationship between genetic resources and early warning of climate events is established through the use of genetic diversity to predict and respond to environmental changes.

the elimination of ozone-depleting substances and the reduction of HCFCs were established. Likewise, the National Implementation Plan for the Management of Persistent Pollutants was updated, and the associated national regulatory structure and framework was formulated, as required by the Stockholm Convention.

Respondents confirmed the assessment that information systems and inter-institutional cooperation for the generation of environmental statistics are in the early stages. Priority needs have been identified, such as improving the interconnectivity of databases, optimizing digital infrastructure and implementing specialized software to effectively monitor and manage environmental policies. Several needs were highlighted, including: promoting digital transformation in entities related to the environment; deepening understanding of the differentiated impact of climate change on women to strengthen the gender perspective in the sector; and expanding access to data to the general population and non-state actors to promote environmental awareness and improve knowledge transfer in public management.

Finding 10. Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. UNDP contributed to capacity building of institutions and communities with an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation, the provision of equipment and inputs, and the emphasis on prevention, all strengthened the country's resilience in relation to the effects of climate change.

The UNDP programme was highly relevant in addressing integrated disaster risk reduction management and building resilience. Respondents highlighted the UNDP leadership role in supporting the implementation of *Tarea Vida*, the national plan to address climate change. They also confirmed that the scope of the UNDP programme addressed critical issues such as the consequences of sea-level rises, land salinization and water availability. The emphasis on risk management and prevention, rather than just disaster response, was especially relevant in the context of worsening extreme weather phenomena, such as hurricanes, and the deterioration of the housing stock increasing the danger of urban collapse due to earthquakes.

UNDP strengthened the capacity of national and subnational institutions through multiple methodological approaches, support to innovation, and the provision of tools and instruments to improve resilience to climate change. The programme updated management tools, generated assessments, supported the design of adaptation plans, studies and action strategies, and procured and installed technical equipment. The 'Guide for the use of the strategic tool for the incorporation of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in development initiatives' was adapted to the Cuban context. The guide is considered to be a relevant knowledge product due to the high degree of inter-institutional collaboration involved.⁴¹

UNDP strengthened the country's monitoring, surveillance and early warning systems and resilience in response to drought. With the use of EU funds, the Institute of Meteorology benefited from the calibration, configuration and installation of 11 automatic weather stations and the integration of the radar data of the Institute of Meteorology and the pluviometry network of the National Institute of Hydraulic Resources. The National Institute of Hydraulic Resources was also strengthened through the installation of 11 well-level and four reservoir-level recorders. The evaluation team observed that equipment had been installed in the province of Ciego de Avila and the promotion of inter-institutional collaboration as a strategy for building resilience.⁴² Institutions benefited from the development of studies covering drought and flood hazard vulnerability and risk; procedures for integrated drought management; and the development of tools for risk management and climate change adaptation contextualized to the water sector. Five central and eastern provinces (covering half a million people) benefited from improved integrated water management.

⁴¹ The following institutions participated: the Cuban Civil Defence (EMNDC), Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA), the National Institute of Hydraulic Resources (INRH), the National Institute of Land Use and Urban Planning (INOTU) and the Institute of Meteorology (INSMET).

⁴² The collaboration between Civil Defence, the Environmental Agency –(AMA), Ciego de Ávila Hydraulic Development Company (EAHCA), INSMET and INRH was observed.

UNDP prioritized the promotion of coastal ecosystems as a strategy for adaptation and the mitigation of climate change impacts. In partnership with the national environmental agency, initiatives such as the EU-funded Coastal Resilience project reported that 4,670 people (including 2,224 women) directly benefited from knowledge and equipment for the implementation of nature-based solutions. UNDP reported that more than 7,200 ha. of coastal wetlands were rehabilitated to enhance the ecosystem service of protection against the impact of extreme weather events and climate change. The 40 'resilient yards' promoted (15 of them led by women) benefited from the gradual recovery of ecosystem services and ecological production.⁴³ The evaluation team noted the psychological and socially transformative impact of this work on the lives of the people involved. UNDP was able to mobilize funding from the Green Climate Fund for the development of this integrated approach to disaster risk reduction, enabling the scaling up of the initiatives to seven provinces and 11 percent of the country's population through the *Mi Costa* project, the implementation of which will be extended until 2029.

In terms of urban resilience, UNDP improved management and intervention capabilities in central areas of Havana to reduce the risk of collapse of vulnerable buildings and to improve the rescue and salvage response. Together with WFP and experts from the EU, UNDP facilitated training courses for the Rescue Brigade of the Cuban Fire Department. These were later replicated by the Brigade, illustrating the effective transfer and appropriation of knowledge at the national level. The digitalization of processes was fundamental for the work of the Brigade, and three new tools were developed to manage the risk of building collapse and urban protocols. It was reported that 7,000 people benefited from preventative interventions in vulnerable buildings and training in the prevention of landslide risk.

UNDP support to enhanced resilience was evenly provided across the country. In geographical terms, the evaluation identified the lack of direct interventions in the province of Cienfuegos and the Special Municipality Isla de la Juventud. Given the vulnerability of these areas they would qualify for interventions to strengthen resilience and reduce risks from disasters. In programmatic terms, there were few activities focused on seismic risk reduction, an area that was highlighted and recommended in the previous ICPE.

Finding 11. Energy efficiency and renewable energy. UNDP promoted the country's incipient transition to the use of renewable energies and energy efficiency, generating regulatory, social, economic and environmental benefits across various sectors and particularly for remote rural households. The energy crisis was testament to the relevance of the results while also highlighting the need to accelerate and expand these lines of work.

Through its ability to act upstream at the policy level and downstream directly with communities, UNDP has positioned itself as an actor with the capacity to contribute to the promotion of renewable energy use and energy efficiency. The energy transition is considered by sector authorities as a national challenge with high strategic value.

Upstream, UNDP contributed to the adjustment of the regulatory framework and capacity-building of governing institutions. At the national level, UNDP established partnerships with the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Electric Union and Cubaenergía. At the municipal level, UNDP updated the regulatory framework for the adoption of a resilient and low-emission public transport system in Havana. This was relevant because it was the seed for the approach used in the promotion of sustainable cities and municipalities.

Downstream, UNDP supplied renewable electricity systems to remote rural communities where electricity had never been available or had been damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017. With the use of EU funding, UNDP enabled close to 3,000 families in rural communities to access and benefit from autonomous

⁴³ Resilient yards are small areas of urban and family farming in coastal communities focused on sustainable production and the reduction of pressure on the coastal ecosystem.

photovoltaic systems. Additionally, in areas of the Cuban coastline affected by Hurricane Irma, 2,272 damaged photovoltaic systems were repaired. These interventions had a very relevant gender perspective, as women were trained in the maintenance of the installed equipment.

UNDP developed demonstration cases of the use of renewable technologies in the agricultural sector and was able to reduce costs and emissions while generating statistical information for decision-making. Through the installation of an integrated network of design, maintenance, repair and expansion services for biodiesel and biogas technologies, operating costs were reduced in agricultural and livestock production units and more than 200 tons of CO₂ emissions were avoided. The intervention was limited to five municipalities, but an estimated 80,000 producers were able to benefit. The National Bioenergy Atlas 2022 was developed for the analysis of the “potential of bioenergy sources and the impact that their use would have on the energy matrix” in different agricultural and forestry industrial sectors. The atlas was to be used as a source of knowledge for the formulation of energy policy until 2050.

Complementary support for energy efficiency in the industrial sector has generated significant national economic benefits and global environmental benefits. The Renewable Energy Sources in Support of Local Development project reported an estimated saving of \$13.8 million in fossil fuels foregone by the food and steel sectors, resulting in more than 71,000 tons of avoided CO₂ emissions per year in these industries.

The implementation of projects revealed some challenges that extend across the entire sector and which have implications for the success of an energy transition: the slowdown of global supply chains had a negative impact on implementation times and costs; the institutional culture of centralized decision-making affected the agility with which to implement interventions at the local level and to strengthen the relationship and collaboration with non-state actors; and high levels of emigration caused the loss of human capital, hindering installed capacity maintenance.

Finding 12. Disaster response and early recovery. UNDP provided early response to disasters with a focus on the housing sector, in coordination with the other United Nations agencies, and integrated with the broader resilience-building framework.

UNDP contributed to the response and early recovery efforts following the numerous disasters affecting the country, building on its pre-positioned assets in the country. UNDP participated in the responses to COVID-19 (Finding 16), Hurricane Ian, and the drought in the Oriente region. UNDP’s responses to unpredictable disasters demonstrated its rapid response capacity. These included the delivery of essential goods to 40 families after the gas explosion at the Saratoga Hotel in 2022 and capacity-building of the fire department in response to the fire at the super tanker base in Matanzas, also in 2022. Similarly, after heavy rains in Granma province in 2023, UNDP was able to respond immediately due to the prepositioning of mattresses in warehouses in Havana, enabling 3,000 people to create habitable conditions after the floods.

In its response to Hurricane Ian in 2022, UNDP prioritized the provision of basic services such as housing, health and food in coordination with the other United Nations agencies, as reflected in the United Nations Action Plan for the disaster. Twelve municipalities in the province of Pinar del Rio were assisted in the area most affected by the hurricane. UNDP reported that it provided humanitarian assistance in terms of shelter to 54,639 people, including 21,722 women, 10,949 children and 2,488 people with disabilities. The evaluation visit to Los Palacios municipality was able to observe the successful rehabilitation of houses and donations delivered. Through the provision of training and tools for 162 professional and community brigades, the roofs of an estimated 17,600 affected houses were repaired. In line with the ‘leave no-one behind’ (LNOB) principle, government priorities for considering social and economic vulnerabilities were respected, giving precedence to the elderly living alone, sick people, people with disabilities and single mothers.

Through medium and long-term projects and an integrated approach, UNDP recovery efforts incorporated resilience-building and institutional strengthening. For example, the response to drought in the central and eastern provinces incorporated livelihood approaches, generating 144 jobs, mostly for young people. This enabled them to formalize their MSMEs into 24 mini-industry groupings with the capacity to build or repair 320 houses per month. 15,000 people in Guantánamo are estimated to have benefited from the construction activities. UNDP supported the reactivation of short-term food production and improved the work environment of more than 1,000 actors in the livestock supply chain, 20 percent of whom were women (cattle producers, technicians and specialists). Moreover, through technology transfer, it contributed to recovering the level of water availability in Santiago de Cuba, which had been heavily impacted by the previous drought, including the direct improvement of water storage capacity for 700 homes.

Various national institutions were strengthened with technology. The renewal of equipment and services at three tidal gauge stations and the installation and start-up of two new stations strengthened the hydrometeorological early warning systems. UNDP contributed to the design of the first two components of the national Early Warning System for Extreme Changes in Mean Sea-level as well as to the strengthening of the disaster risk reduction management centres and early warning points in four municipalities and four coastal communities in north-central Cuba.

Disaster response and early recovery work was not without its difficulties and challenges. Significant economic and financial limitations faced by the country led to the delay of some logistical operations and difficulties in global supply chains caused delays in procurement processes. The recovery in the province of Pinar del Rio one year after the passage of Hurricane Ian was still estimated to be only 40 percent complete.

2.5 Outcome 4: Accessible, high-quality public and care services

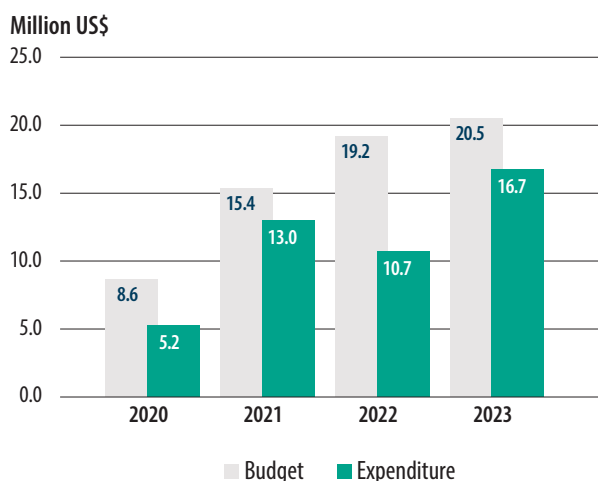
CPD Outcome 4: Improved accessibility and quality of public services and social protection and care systems, considering population dynamics, with emphasis on vulnerable groups, applying a gender and human-rights approach.

Related outputs:

OUTPUT 4.1: Strengthened capacities of national, territorial and community-based actors to provide accessible, high-quality public and care services, considering demographic dynamics, applying a gender and human rights approach.

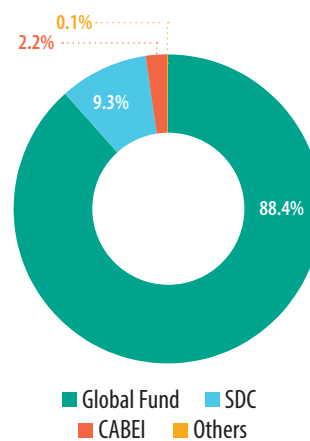
This programme outcome was the largest in terms of expenditure and had the best execution rate. UNDP implemented eight projects at a total budget of \$63.7 million and expenditure of \$45.6 million, representing a 72 percent execution rate (Figure 13 for the annual breakdown). In terms of funding sources, almost \$40.4 million, representing 90 percent of the expenditure, came from the Global Fund (Figure 14). This highlighted the importance of the Global Fund for the UNDP programme in Cuba. SDC also supported this outcome, and almost \$4.3 million was spent on supporting vocational technical education (VTE) and access to employment for young people.

FIGURE 13: Outcome 4: Budget and expenditure by year



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

FIGURE 14: Outcome 4: Expenditure by donor



Finding 13. The health system and response to HIV. With funds from the Global Fund, UNDP contributed to the improved prevention, treatment and follow-up of HIV and strengthening of the health system. UNDP provided Cuba with equipment, instruments and methodologies for accurate epidemiological follow-up. The achievement of planned results was limited by the lack of committed national co-financing and the COVID-19 pandemic. The sustainability of progress achieved will depend to a large extent on continued financial support from the Global Fund beyond 2026.

UNDP has been a key actor in the response to the HIV epidemic in Cuba, executing Global Fund resources in the country. Respondents and documents reviewed indicated that the UNDP country office had the technical, programmatic and administrative capacity to execute a high volume of resources in a highly complex context, while responding to the demands of the Global Fund and national institutions. Despite Cuba’s international recognition for its successful performance in monitoring HIV cases, the country had limited capacity to confront the COVID-19 pandemic challenges during 2020 and 2021 and the economic situation limited the availability of essential supplies. In those years, results in terms of coverage of prevention services, HIV testing and viral load testing in key populations were unfavourable.

UNDP’s provision of equipment, medicines and other inputs, as well as instruments and methodologies for closer epidemiological monitoring, contributed to advances in the national HIV response capacity. In 2022, a favourable trend was observed in key HIV programme result indicators. UNDP supported relevant HIV prevention and diagnostic services provided to people from key populations, antiretroviral treatment, and treatment for tuberculosis and Hepatitis C.⁴⁴ UNDP provided HIV prevention supplies and procured self-testing kits for 30 municipalities.⁴⁵ By June 2023, 30 polyclinics in different municipalities had been provided with equipment and supplies to offer differentiated HIV services. Of these, six municipalities received GenXpert technology, thus facilitating viral load monitoring. In addition, UNDP contributed to 13 facilities offering pre-exposure therapy for key populations, reaching 536 men who have sex with men (MSM) and 31 transgender people linked to these facilities.

⁴⁴ In 2022, 144,501 individuals from key populations (141,678 MSM and 2,823 transgender women) accessed prevention services and another 135,433 (132,874 MSM and 2,559 transgender women) accessed HIV diagnosis services.

⁴⁵ The delivery of supplies for HIV prevention services was supported with 4.8 million condoms, 1.8 million lubricants, 610,000 rapid HIV tests to guarantee the offer of combined prevention services to the populations most vulnerable to HIV infection (MSM and transgender people), and for the first time, 14,400 self-tests.

The initial lack of co-financing was a major conditioning factor for the cycle and, together with the continuity of financial support from the Global Fund, represents the main risk to sustainability of the results.⁴⁶ Cuba established national co-financing, which was projected at the beginning of the period to total \$8.2 million, but this did not materialize. This was a major constraint for the achievement of the results, as goals in the design were dependent on this co-financing for the acquisition of inputs for prevention services.⁴⁷ UNDP contributed to mitigating this constraint by reinvesting \$0.7 million of Global Fund savings and mobilizing an additional \$2.6 million of Global Fund resources. This shows how the sustainability of outcomes for HIV and control of the epidemic are still dependent on Global Fund resources.

UNDP also implemented interventions aimed at strengthening the Cuban health system. It worked with over 200 pharmacies and distribution and warehousing entities to strengthen the health supply chain. It strengthened capacity to cope with future pandemics by providing laboratory and diagnostic systems for hospitals and primary health-care facilities offering intensive care services.⁴⁸ Likewise, new health technologies and supplies provided to 27 molecular biology laboratories throughout the country strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health in epidemiological surveillance, diagnosis and monitoring of several diseases, including COVID-19, HIV, Human Papillomavirus and Hepatitis C. Even so, there is still room for further strengthening of the country's capacity to respond to pandemic emergencies, particularly through improvements to annual procurement planning. UNDP supported 41 polyclinics and 21 hospital services to install devices to digitalize the X-ray service. The implementation of a laboratory information system was part of a funding request to the Global Fund that was not approved. In that sense, the structural challenge of enhancing the digitalization of the health-care system remains.

Finding 14. Care systems and vulnerable groups. UNDP support to the care and protection of vulnerable groups was evident in some key populations, such as LGBTIQ+ people, and more limited in others, such as older people, for whom there was no holistic approach to date. UNDP was able to bring visibility to the health access barriers faced by LGBTIQ+ people and strengthen the networks through which they coordinate their response to the HIV pandemic. The promotion of a rights-based approach was a novelty in UNDP work on these issues. Sustainability was pursued as an objective by promoting the legal autonomy of key population organizations, a result that is still emerging.

UNDP aimed to enhance accessibility to, and the quality of, social protection and care systems, considering demographic dynamics and focusing on vulnerable groups with a gender and human rights approach. However, outcomes varied across different population groups. This objective resonated strongly with the recommendation from the previous ICPE for UNDP to uphold the LNOB principle, emphasizing vulnerable groups such as the LGBTIQ+ community or older people. While UNDP achieved significant progress with the LGBTIQ+ community from a rights-based approach, it struggled to extend interventions for older people beyond specific project boundaries, with limited impact on overall care for older people. Interventions were only seen in the response to the emergency caused by Hurricane Ian, or indirectly through PADIT with the provision of furniture and supplies to day-care centres.

In its work with LGBTIQ+ populations, UNDP contributed to the capacity-building of national and local social institutions and promoted respect for diversity and a rights-based approach to HIV through the reduction of stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It also strengthened the capacity of civil society networks to support an effective response to HIV through individual and organizational

⁴⁶ Due to the nature of the funding arrangements, the funds from the Global Fund will terminate if the country achieves the expected results and indicators to continue on its own.

⁴⁷ Such as condoms, lubricants, rapid tests, viral load reagents, or medication.

⁴⁸ In terms of equipment, 12 portable x-ray machines, 20 mechanical ventilators and 30 portable vacuum cleaners were delivered. Also, a large number of medical devices were delivered: pulse oximeters, infrared thermometers, cricothyrotomy sets, nasal cannulas, laryngoscopes, oxygen regulators, infusion pumps.

capacity building, and national and international partnerships and dialogues.⁴⁹ Among the results reported, UNDP strengthened the capacity of 223 key population activists and health system counsellors (70 MSM, 64 transgender women and 89 people living with HIV) with training as gender and rights managers. The work of these managers in 23 legal advice services directly reached 910 people (275 women and 635 men) with legal advice. Respondents indicated the satisfaction reported by participating sectoral actors and recognized the importance of contributions made by UNDP in this cycle.

The sustainability of these achievements was sought through the official registration of these civil society networks with the Ministry of Justice, which would allow them to achieve legal autonomy and receive funds directly. The relevance of this process was high, given that the difficulty of obtaining sufficient resources to carry out prevention activities and obtain basic supplies to advance the HIV response were among the main challenges identified for these civil society networks.

Finding 15. Youth professional development. UNDP worked with youth to promote their access to professional employment, with initial results linked to the construction, agriculture and tourism services sectors. These results were relevant, considering the high vulnerability of young people and high levels of emigration. The approach considered the socioeconomic interest of each participating geographical area, and responded to labour force needs assessments and national development strategies. The challenges encountered were the high teacher turnover and the need for continuous training.

UNDP took advantage of its experience in local development to engage in youth development with a focus on professional employment. Through the SDC-funded Programme of Vocational Training of Young People and Workers in Technical and Vocational Education in Selected Specialties for their Insertion into Employment (PROFET), UNDP contributed to enhanced access of young people to employment in the construction, agriculture and tourism services sectors, with the strengthening of VTE. In this case, UNDP sought to promote local social and economic development by improving the inclusion, quality and relevance of VTE for a vulnerable sector of the population experiencing difficulty in accessing employment: the youth.

UNDP support was relevant because it was based on local socioeconomic interests and responded to the labour force needs of the country. Pilot tests were conducted to study employer demand and the entry of trained workers into the labour market. A new approach to VTE management was applied, representing a shift away from the vertical model that had been historically used in the country. The new approach is based on the nexus between education and local development and aligned with the Cuban development model. This generated challenges for the education sector, which were still unresolved at the time of this evaluation. These included the generation of competencies at the local level, the need being intensified by high teacher turnover due to teachers leaving to higher paying jobs or emigration and thus creating the need for continuous training.

The effectiveness of the approach was well appreciated by stakeholders, and its sustainability has been supported by an extension of the project and additional donor funding.⁵⁰ UNDP reached over 24,000 students, 30 percent of whom were women. Much of the support provided was through the delivery of teaching and training equipment to participating polytechnics.⁵¹ Capacity was transferred at ministerial and provincial levels and the certification of gender-responsive polytechnics was promoted. Although coverage was achieved in the 15 provinces of the country and the scope was extended to 53 educational institutions

⁴⁹ The key population groups and civil society networks most directly involved in Cuba's response to HIV have traditionally consisted of those most at risk of HIV infection (transgender people, men who have sex with men, people living with HIV, and people who engage in transactional sex).

⁵⁰ The PROFET project has been extended to a second phase until the end of 2024, to include three new VTE areas: electricity, communications and transportation. An additional budget of \$1.5 million has been committed for this purpose.

⁵¹ Including for instance: ICT equipment, language laboratories, veterinary laboratories, a mini-food industry and an artificial insemination set.

compared to the 36 initially planned, this only represents 13.2 percent of the total 402 polytechnics in the country. Scale-up and full sustainability will require building on pilot experiences of the first phase to promote institutionalization of the approach through public policy.

This area of work has demonstrated the high potential for inter-agency collaboration and inter-institutional alliances. The Social and Labour Observatory was inaugurated, supported by the RCO, the International Labour Organization, ECLAC and UNDP, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and this enabled two employer surveys to be conducted, one on the quality of VTE graduate training, and another on employer satisfaction. Pending official publication, preliminary findings point to satisfactory results in terms of improvement of competencies and skills and in terms of acceptance by employers.

Despite disability issues being included in training and materials, and students experiencing social disadvantage or learning difficulties once enrolled, it was noted that there was room to enhance joint LNOB initiatives in the education sector. Respondents also highlighted the potential to promote greater coordination with other initiatives at the local level, and with the governance and productive transformation CPD outcome. UNDP should also consider the promotion of youth employment as a key cross-cutting issue for the development of human capital and the country's economic development.

2.6 Cross-cutting issues

Finding 16. COVID-19 response and recovery support. UNDP was a key partner responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba, expanding its support to health services and economic recovery and accelerating digital transformation. The support for the early establishment of genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 was a key contribution that allowed the development of studies on the effectiveness, efficacy and immune response of Cuban vaccines in relation to the different variants of SARS CoV-2. There were delays in programme implementation but it remained operationally active and demonstrated responsiveness.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic did not substantially modify the UNDP country programme approaches. However, it did trigger the strengthening of key intervention areas such as health services and economic recovery and prompted measures to move towards digital transformation and better access to ICT. UNDP provided technical leadership to the socioeconomic and gender-responsive response to COVID-19 promoted by the United Nations in Cuba. This involved providing the relevant national authorities and key strategic sectors with the Study on Economic and Social Impacts of the pandemic, an analytical tool for decision-making for the overall response. This product was part of the United Nations Response Plan, which was an integrated package of strategic support in response to national priorities.⁵²

UNDP played a key role in supporting the health response by facilitating the early implementation of SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance and supporting research on the efficacy and immune response of Cuban vaccines in relation to the SARS-CoV-2 variants. In addition, UNDP supported the creation of the Medical Supplies Plant of the Neurosciences Centre to produce large quantities of swabs for tests and masks. It also contributed to the procurement of medicines, medical equipment and transportation, providing rapid tests, re-agents and consumables for laboratories. Medicines and personal protective equipment, including masks, gloves and gowns, were provided for the treatment of COVID-19 and to protect medical personnel and community volunteers, which was particularly relevant during the early stage of the pandemic response.⁵³

⁵² First, under the technical leadership of Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and WHO, the Emergency Response Plan was developed, followed by an Immediate Socioeconomic Response Plan of the United Nations Secretariat (UNS) in Cuba.

⁵³ UNDP reported an immediate response to the pandemic in support of the health system during 2020 through the delivery of 16,000 PCR diagnostic test kits; 12,000 units of specimen transport media; 3 ultrasound scanners; 66,464 medical/surgical masks (IIR and N95); 220 infrared thermometers; personal protective equipment for health personnel: 70,000 gloves, 15,000 gowns, 67,000 biological waste bags; and more than 9,310 bottles of antibacterial gel.

The programme demonstrated agility and adaptability on the part of UNDP. Despite disruptions and delays that affected the projects and existing connectivity limitations, operations mostly continued. The isolation measures and the disruption of the global supply chain caused delays in most projects. There were negative impacts on training activities, fieldwork, equipment imports and acquisitions, which affected, among others, the *Agrofrutales*, *VUINEX*, *Post Irma Energy Resilience*, *FRELocal* and the *Bioenergy* projects. However, strength in the areas of governance and productive transformation accelerated interventions for economic recovery and the generation of livelihoods, jobs and food security for the population. Projects sought to address demands from the population, hospitals and isolation centres. The emphasis of agricultural projects on minimal tillage, short-cycle crops, and animal feed production showcased adaptability to the range of challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Post-emergency recovery efforts were focused on strengthening community and local resilience. UNDP supported initiatives to address the basic needs of vulnerable communities, protect livelihoods, manage risks and strengthen preparedness for future emergencies. In the area of socioeconomic recovery, three projects implemented in the province of Guantanamo resulted in the creation and consolidation of jobs for youth and women, the recovery of livelihoods and the revitalization of key productive sectors– benefiting more than 1,500 people, including 500 youth and 375 women.

Finding 17. Gender equality. UNDP supported the Government in the implementation of its national plan for the advancement of women. It was also recognized for its contributions to the mainstreaming of gender equality in the areas of productive development, resilience in the face of climate change, and health. There are persistent challenges that warrant UNDP’s continuing promotion of transformative socio-cultural changes.

UNDP was a reference partner for the Government in promoting the advancement of women and gender equality. Although equality and equity in social and economic affairs have underpinned the Cuban social development model, gender equality has also been recognized as a social good that is not obtained automatically. Consequently, in 2021, through Presidential Decree 198, the National Plan for the Advancement of Women was approved with the objective of “Promoting the advancement of women and equal rights, opportunities and possibilities... as well as deepening the objective and subjective factors that, as expressions of discrimination, persist in Cuban society and hinder a greater result in the economic, political, social and family, in order to eliminate them.”⁵⁴ Since the approval of the plan, UNDP has supported the Federation of Cuban Women and other national and local organizations and institutions to implement the National Plan. This has resulted in actions related to economic empowerment, gender training, mainstreaming gender in national policies, and communication campaigns. The creation of the Gender Observatory in collaboration with the Federation of Cuban Women and the National Office of Statistics and Information stood out as a successful achievement.

UNDP focused its efforts to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment on three priority areas: i) agrifood value chains and local systems, ii) resilience to climate change, and iii) SDG localization. This mainly involved the generation of knowledge products and tools to identify, reveal, evidence and use information for decision-making that favours inclusive and egalitarian development. An example was the integration of gender equality for quality management of food safety systems into agrifood value chains. Interviewees underscored UNDP contributions in communication and awareness-raising, highlighting the campaign ‘Away with Gender Stereotypes: Breaking the Mould’, the first in the country aiming to deconstruct sexist stereotypes. Respondents also highlighted the methodology for gender mainstreaming in education, as part of UNDP support to professional youth training. This is regarded as a methodological reference for

⁵⁴ *Gaceta Oficial 2021. Decreto Presidencial 198. Programa Nacional para el Adelanto de las Mujeres.*

other institutions. More than 9,000 women were trained (37 percent of all participants), resulting in cases of young women accessing non-traditional trades in Matanzas and getting involved in the livestock production chain in Guantanamo.

The promotion of gender equality and the advancement of the rights agenda were particularly evident in the HIV response and health system support. The empowerment of transgender people, women and men living with HIV, and MSM was enhanced to address entrenched structural barriers that maintain gender inequalities and reinforce discrimination, stigma and violence. Direct observation in health centres and reports indicate that the capacity of institutions and CSOs for gender-sensitive communication, knowledge management and health data collection were strengthened. Respondents highlighted the 'Equals' campaign of 2022, led by the Ministry of Public Health with technical assistance from UNDP and which had an impact on the protection of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people. In addition, UNDP was mindful of the LNOB principle in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities, in Havana's low-carbon transportation systems, in their professional strengthening as part of PROFET, and in their prioritization for the delivery of emergency aid and resilience-promotion in disaster risk management.

While progress was recognized, respondents also highlighted persistent challenges in the country. These included women's access to employment, the early childhood and elderly care system, gender-based violence, and the disproportionate impact of climate change on women. The COVID-19 pandemic was perceived to have set back progress made in these areas. The lack of resources, resistance to change and the persistence of stigmatizing sociocultural norms and sexist stereotypes were also mentioned. In relation to future priorities, respondents highlighted the need to focus on awareness and education, diversify communication channels, advance social networks and address masculinity where it manifests in a toxic way.

Internally, UNDP Cuba has continuously promoted gender mainstreaming and achieved the Gold Seal of Gender Equality corporate recognition for the third consecutive time. These efforts were built on the Gender Equality Strategy for Sustainable and Inclusive Development programme ("*DiGéneroSí*"), which has been in place since 2014. The country office is supported by a fully dedicated National Gender Officer and a Gender Focal Group composed of members from programmes and operations and led by the Deputy Resident Representative. These efforts were reflected in a programme with the majority of projects (Figure 15) and expenditure (Figure 16) allocated to GEN-2 projects, which means that they had gender equality as a significant objective.⁵⁵ In terms of the IEO GRES, results were mainly gender-targeted, some were gender-responsive, responding to men's and women's differentiated needs, and a few were potentially gender-transformative, addressing the root causes of inequality and discrimination.

⁵⁵ UNDP Gender Marker measures how much a project invests in gender equality and women's empowerment. They are assigned by output, and there are 4 categories: GEN3 (Gender equality as a principal objective); GEN2 (Gender equality as a significant objective); GEN1 (Limited contribution to gender equality); GEN0 (No contribution to gender quality).

FIGURE 15: Number of projects by gender marker

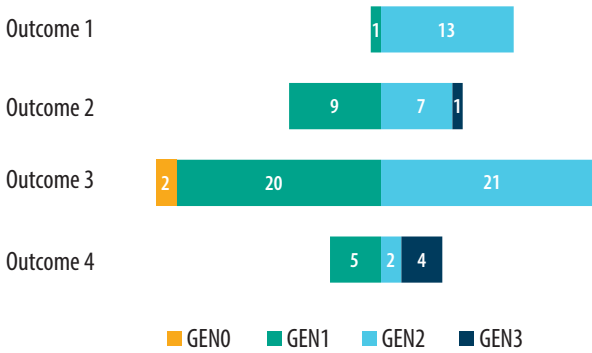
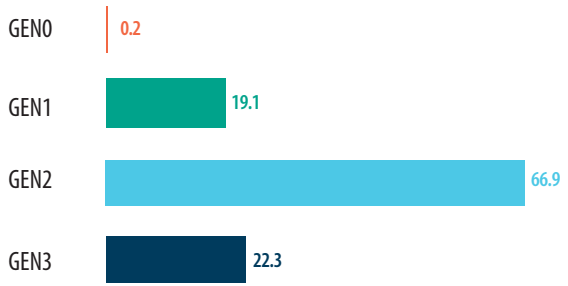


FIGURE 16: Expenditure by gender marker (in million US\$)



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

Finding 18. Innovation and digitalization. UNDP promoted innovation in its different areas of work, in particular with the innovative strategy to promote MSMEs as a new economic actor. Digital transformation began to be mainstreamed in different programme areas as an important facilitator of development. With the emphasis on the assessment and design of platforms and plans for strengthening digital capacity, the type of products delivered in this cycle showed ample space for expanding support and cooperation in this area, which is an identified national priority.

In this cycle, UNDP proposed the integration of innovation initiatives and support for digital transformation as cross-cutting themes. The evaluation was able to observe initial results of this strategy in the different areas of programming. Direct observation and inputs from counterparts confirmed that continuing to promote digital transformation through the renewal of equipment and technological infrastructure is an ongoing priority, with ample opportunity for collaboration. In this cycle and in partnership with the Ministry of Communications, UNDP initiated a joint approach to these challenges, with the first digital readiness assessment of the country. This is expected to be an important input into a roadmap for the future.

One innovative and strategic aspect of the programme was the promotion of the enabling environment for work with MSMEs. As highlighted in finding 6, the promotion of MSMEs was new in the country, and this work was underpinned by the national priority given to it and the trust placed in UNDP. UNDP was thus able to promote the role of MSMEs in development initiatives, through strengthening local decision-making environments under PADIT’s ‘Boosting MSMEs’ or strengthening local supply chains.

Most projects in the area of the environment had an innovation component, including: the use of scientific knowledge in analysis and planning; the application of theoretical-methodological approaches in field activities; and the promotion of renewable energy technologies. The projects financed by the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility were focused on promoting a paradigm shift in the management of production systems and natural ecosystems, through approaches and methodologies based on systems theories. This gave them an innovative component. Most projects showed a good mix between scientific and technological innovation and the transfer and application of concrete nature-based solutions, as explained in finding 9.

The drive for digital transformation had tangible results in all areas of the programme. The constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to implement virtual solutions to ensure continuity of services and boost recovery were key factors in advancing digital transformation. To promote digital governance, UNDP

provided support at national and local levels for design processes for digital transformation strategies, as in the case of Havana, as well as guidelines for the digitalization of public services. As part of the PADIT toolkit, support was provided for the development of the Guide for Digital Government Management. Evidence-based decision-making was strengthened by new environmental information systems and the creation of situation rooms for decision-making through the InfoGeo Platform. UNDP also developed the Workshop on Smart and Sustainable Cities, which strengthened the enabling environment for digital transformation in urban settings. The workshop brought together 80 participants and initiatives from all over the country, connecting people, organizations, institutions and companies with different proposals for digitalizing solutions to meet the country's SDGs.

Expected outcomes in the areas of economic transformation and health benefited from the digital transformation components of some projects, such as the creation of *VUINEX* (Finding 6) and its digital platform for the management of foreign investment processes. The *Digital Jump* project also had a significant impact on institutional processes within the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment. Despite delays in equipment delivery caused by disruptions to global supply chains, notable improvements were reported in technological infrastructure, performance and connectivity. Digital competencies were promoted among teachers and students within the VTE focus of PROFET. The planning and delivery of health services for the populations most vulnerable to the HIV epidemic was strengthened by developing the Datasoft and MEDISYS-HIV digital systems and designing the GENESYS-HIV integrated services digital platform.

Finding 19. Monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management. The monitoring and evaluation functions saw a significant increase in their workload given the new scale of the programme and the requirements of new donors, which recognized UNDP's good performance. Knowledge management practices in line with UNDP's portfolio approach were reflected in the design of the most recent projects.

UNDP proposed an ambitious programme evaluation plan that had to be revised due to a range of contextual constraints, such as COVID-19 and the effects on travelling of the energy crisis. The impact of the pandemic on the implementation of projects and their timelines also resulted in the need to adjust evaluation timelines. In order to maintain the pace of implementation of the evaluation plan, virtual and face-to-face evaluation modalities were combined. The formulated plan had a total of 24 evaluations and an estimated budget of more than \$500,000. At the time of this evaluation, 13 evaluations had been completed, 70 percent of which were assessed to be 'moderately satisfactory'. UNDP did not carry out any impact evaluation, which was a missed opportunity, given the quantitative nature of some of the projects and the possibility of using control groups for impact measurement.

Project monitoring was marked by the quality control requirements of donors. The Global Fund added new requirements, and the increased number of donors (such as the Green Climate Fund, EU, France and Italy) generated the need for additional efforts to meet their specific requirements. Knowledge management and the exchange of best practices were reflected in the joint formulation of projects within the UNDP country office. In the spirit of the portfolio approach, the design processes of the most recent initiatives, such as the Global Environment Facility 8, PADIT Phase 3, or the promotion of sustainable municipalities, incorporated input from all programme teams. The emphasis was on seeking to replicate good practices and enhance innovative and integrative approaches.

Finding 20. Finance and operations. UNDP saw growing programme budgets and record budget execution figures in this cycle. However, the lower execution ratio also pointed to the need to continue strengthening implementation and operational capacity. Although the programme has significantly diversified its funding sources, stakeholders highlighted the need for UNDP's corporate funds and their strategic use. The country office experienced a significant increase in staff to meet programme growth, but also faced some operational challenges, such as the implementation of *Quantum*, as well as the added complication of limited internet connectivity.

Financially, this programme cycle was marked by growing programme budgets and the challenge of maintaining execution rates. With one year of the programme remaining, the country office managed to surpass the \$100.7 million budget execution target set in the CPD. The years 2021, 2022 and 2023 all saw record annual budget execution figures. While absolute execution figures also reached their highest levels, the execution ratio declined to 63 percent in this cycle. This highlighted the need to continue strengthening the office's implementation and operational capacity. UNDP made great efforts to diversify funding sources and incorporate new donors, such as CABEL, the French cooperation agency or the Green Climate Fund. However, respondents stressed the importance of UNDP being able to rely on its own resources, which enabled Green Climate Fund -readiness and the unlocking of the funds for the *Mi Costa* project. In contrast, the lack of own resources limited the full achievement of the second stage of the *VUINEX* project, which could not reach the desired scope at the level of municipalities.

In terms of human resources, while the office structure did not change significantly, the number of staff increased substantially, in line with programmatic growth. Between 2021 and 2023, staff numbers increased by 43 percent to 103 people. In the operations area, this increase was mainly reflected in the procurement section. The programme growth and the transition to different project implementation modalities, such as direct implementation or support to national implementation, were key factors in the increased workload and drivers for strengthening capabilities and reconfiguring roles and responsibilities.

The work of the UNDP Treasury team to enable banking transactions to suppliers abroad and thus facilitate project implementation were notable, given the current context of the country. UNDP also strengthened its procurement function by developing new standard operating procedures and promoting access to international procurement certifications. During the implementation of *Quantum* a major challenge was keeping the office operational, and the office reported delays in certain processes. The new system created a huge transactional burden by multiplying internal approval levels. In addition, the limited connectivity nation-wide meant that stakeholders found it difficult to make optimal use of the suppliers' portal. The risks arising from limited internet connectivity in the country were consistently reported by the country office, as it did not reach optimal corporate standards, and additional costs were incurred to mitigate the risks. In this regard, the exchange and support of the UNDP regional ICT team was acknowledged.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: The programme's coherence with previous cycles, the effectiveness of implementation at national and local level and the capacity to adapt to new challenges allowed UNDP to remain strategically positioned as a trusted and respected development partner in Cuba and to expand the scope and results of the initially proposed programme.

The current CPD maintained programmatic coherence with UNDP's previous cooperation with Cuba. This was particularly reflected in the emphasis on deepening the decentralization process initiated under PADIT, and in the support for productive transformation at subnational level. Given the constraints of the national context, the effectiveness of project implementation was widely recognized by counterparts and donors. Confidence in UNDP was demonstrated by the allocation of record-high budgets for three consecutive years, though the need to continue strengthening the programme and operations teams in order to attend to new demands and improve execution ratios was also highlighted.

UNDP demonstrated its capacity to respond and adapt to COVID-19 and other emergencies, such as Hurricane Ian. The impacts of the pandemic on national and global supply chains forced the recalculation of time and costs in some projects. However, the continuity in execution achieved by UNDP not only facilitated the arrival of emergency response funds, but also strengthened the expansion of the health, environment and climate change portfolios. This was largely aided by the confidence placed in UNDP by donors such as the Global Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund. A noted outstanding achievement was the timely response of UNDP in facilitating the CABEL loan to the country—the first given to Cuba by an IFI in six decades.

Conclusion 2: UNDP contributed to local governance development and productive transformation, reinforcing the country's decentralization process and contributing to the promotion of new economic actors for the revitalization of the local economy. There is a need at the local level to continue promoting the transfer of competencies, functions and resources. The different crises faced by Cuba in this cycle reinforced the relevance of UNDP interventions, but socioeconomic decline limited the potential impact of work to reinforce agricultural value chains and modernize the banking system.

UNDP support to PADIT and its role over the years, as a convener of actors and processes at provincial and local levels, were key factors in expanding UNDP's visibility outside of the capital, Havana. As a result, UNDP's capacity to engage and execute projects at subnational level was widely recognized by stakeholders and donors. PADIT provided an example of how a development project can be transformed into public policy and, as a result, strengthen the enabling environment for deeper decentralization, build local capacity and convene institutions. However, the decentralization process still requires further public policy development for the effective transfer of competencies, functions and resources to local levels.

In terms of productive transformation, UNDP support to the national effort to promote MSMEs was the most transformative contribution, particularly because of the new economic role of these entities and their potential to inject dynamism into the national economy. UNDP support to strengthen value chains, particularly in terms of providing equipment and technological assistance, was recognized by stakeholders. This resulted in increased local food production, the replacement of imports with locally produced goods, and infrastructure development. Likewise, banking transformation initiatives resulted in efficiency gains and skills development. Some of these productive transformation initiatives are the result of efforts begun in previous programme cycles. However, the multiple crises faced by the country during this cycle and their negative socioeconomic impact diluted the visibility of the country programme's aggregated impacts and contributions in these areas.

Conclusion 3: UNDP was strategic and effective in articulating a relevant and far-reaching portfolio on sustainable management of natural ecosystems, climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction. Synergies were evidenced in areas such as drought prevention and response, or the management of coastal ecosystems and their resilience in the face of extreme weather events. National ownership of the initiatives was high, supported by the mix of policy level results and direct interventions on the ground, which were particularly observable in the areas of emergency response and energy transition.

This thematic portfolio demonstrated its strategic and effective nature by generating short-term changes and creating conditions for transformation in the medium and long term. In the short term, notable achievements included soil recovery, biodiversity conservation, reforestation, carbon retention and economic compensation for environmental services. Moreover, the portfolio contributed to fostering an enabling environment, evidenced by achievements in facilitating a fair transition to renewable energy sources, the development of sustainable cities, responsible land management, the generation of scientific data for the preservation of marine biodiversity, and the mobilization of financial resources from multilateral environmental funds. Most of these areas present complex challenges for advancing and scaling up while leaving no one behind. The recent energy crisis highlighted the great challenge involved in achieving an energy transition and decarbonization of the energy matrix, which will require scale and funding far beyond those currently seen in UNDP projects.

The promotion of ecosystem-based approaches and the generation of synergy between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts materialized in the multiple contributions to the implementation of the *Tarea Vida* National Plan to address climate change and its impact on the country. The strengthening of monitoring, surveillance and early warning systems, as well as the promotion of inter-institutional coordination to address droughts and emergencies, were highly relevant achievements. UNDP demonstrated its emergency response capacity in this cycle. The contribution to the recovery after Hurricane Ian was coherent and well coordinated with the other United Nations agencies. UNDP demonstrated its agility by having secured pre-positioned supplies in the country. The response and delivery of humanitarian aid adhered to LNOB principles and the priority given to people with disabilities stood out.

Conclusion 4: Funding from the Global Fund enabled UNDP to continue strengthening HIV awareness and prevention efforts among key populations and providing care for people living with HIV. Progress was made in expanding rights and lowering barriers related to human rights and gender that limited health access for vulnerable populations. However, the sustainability of results was affected by the limited national financing capacities.

UNDP support enabled the Government to implement programmes aimed at providing social awareness, counselling and voluntary HIV testing to the population. National capacity was strengthened through training programmes for health workers, civil society networks and other actors to facilitate HIV prevention and control. The emphasis on improving monitoring and data management systems was very relevant and recognized by partners. The Government and Global Fund's trust in UNDP was key in mitigating the absence of established co-financing and mobilizing additional funds.

UNDP contributed to progress in lowering gender-related barriers and promoting the rights agenda. It contributed studies to make visible the barriers to access to health care for the most vulnerable population and worked continuously to strengthen civil society networks.

Conclusion 5: The focus and results of the UNDP programme in terms of strengthening information systems, digital transformation and work with vulnerable populations contributed to increases in the national capacity to obtain and produce data on poverty and vulnerability. This also highlighted the potential for strengthening public policies oriented towards the youth, women and the elderly.

Results in terms of new tools and metrics to measure poverty and vulnerability in the country enabled the traditional approach of universality of social benefits to be complemented by an analytical approach directed at vulnerable populations, thus enabling new frameworks for public discussion. The drive for digital transformation was an opportunity seized in the wake of COVID-19, and this is a priority recognized by national counterparts. In terms of effectiveness and sustainability, a large number of challenges were identified that UNDP cooperation can be instrumental in addressing in the future. These included hardware (access to equipment and technology), software (licences), human capital (skills and talent retention) and management (lack of interoperability of sectoral information systems).

From the programme's work different population groups and the consideration of population dynamics, the work to promote youth professional development stood out in this cycle. This was particularly relevant for reinforcing the link between the education sector and economic development and for its focus on strengthening human capital, which has been weakened by high levels of emigration. As in the previous cycle, attention to other social and demographic dynamics such as ageing, was again absent from the scope of the programme.

Conclusion 6: UNDP was a reference partner for national counterparts in the promotion of the National Plan for the Advancement of Women. UNDP took advantage of normative changes to promote the visibility of gender gaps and existing challenges to achieve socio-cultural changes with transformative potential.

UNDP was a reliable partner for key national counterparts in the promotion of gender equality, which was reflected in the promotion of gender strategies in different areas. These included: productive development; support for the implementation of the national gender strategy for the agriculture system; education with PROFET; and health, via the HIV response. Support was also provided to national statistical institutions to promote the generation of disaggregated data, leading to the creation of the Gender Observatory. However, the need to advance the generation and quality of disaggregated data was one of the main challenges identified, particularly at the subnational level.

The country office promotion of gender equality was again recognized with the corporate Gold Seal. Many of the projects had the explicit intention to favour the inclusion of women, and some of them addressed cultural aspects such as sexist stereotypes. However, there was room for more emphasis on addressing the structural causes of gender inequalities, the greater vulnerability of women to the effects of climate change, the unequal distribution of care work, and the roots of gender-based violence.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: UNDP should further promote digital transformation and mobilize financing for development in Cuba, working on greater inter-institutional and multilevel collaboration involving key ministries to support the country in the progress towards the achievement of PNDES 2030 targets and the SDGs. UNDP should place special emphasis on information systems, statistics, results-based management tools and the application of multidimensional methodologies to support decision-making and with a focus on key social policies.

UNDP should continue to work towards greater collaboration from key ministries operating in Macro-programme 1 of PNDES 2030, promoting greater dialogue and intersectoral integration. This is in order to improve the interoperability of sectoral statistical information systems, the digitalization of government services and the appropriation of mechanisms for the integration of the SDGs at subnational level. It should also continue supporting the country in the application of multidimensional methodologies and tools for measuring poverty and vulnerability, as well as those for measuring the impact of public policies. This is in order to strengthen the entire cycle of results-based management, evidence-based

decision-making and institutional accountability. UNDP should take greater advantage of the national academy to promote results-based assessment of national policies and projects, including its own. To support those mechanisms and achieve the SDGs, UNDP should further leverage its integrator role and the work with its global networks to mobilize financing for development.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should leverage its strategic positioning and knowledge in terms of local development and productive transformation in the country in support of the government economic productivity agenda, considering existing capacity and area-based comparative advantages, to maximize the results and impacts of its interventions.

UNDP should continue to support the priorities of decentralization—that is, promoting the effective transfer of competencies, functions and resources to accelerate municipal and provincial capacity development. UNDP should continue working with subnational authorities on the promotion of spaces for citizen participation and encouraging youth economic empowerment at the local level. UNDP should also continue to support the country in expanding and strengthening the regulatory and institutional framework for the promotion of MSMEs and their integration into local economies. It should also support the expansion of the financing mechanisms available to MSMEs from Cuban commercial banks, their export capacities, and incentives to strengthen cooperation with local authorities. In relation to value chains, there is a need to enhance the work with cooperatives and the development of an enterprise ecosystem integrating MSMEs, cooperatives and the public sector. This is in order to improve performance in terms of production, value added and the transition to a green economy. This will require the continuity and effectiveness of public policies and the capacity of the national and local institutional system.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should further support the transition to a resilient and less carbon-intensive energy model for Cuba, leveraging both its capacity to attract development funding and its experience in promoting renewable energy infrastructure.

UNDP should increase its support for the promotion of broad partnerships for a just energy transition. Here, its presence can foster the enabling conditions, particularly financial mechanisms, and mitigate risks. In addition, its capacity for dialogue can enable the presence of non-governmental actors such as academia, CSOs, MSMEs or foreign investors. In urban areas, this transition could be coordinated around sustainable city approaches, with an emphasis on the transition to urban mobility models and the promotion of the circular economy.

Recommendation 4: In the areas of climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction, UNDP should continue promoting initiatives aimed at the rational and sustainable management of water resources, reinforcing water quality monitoring systems, and expanding the scope of its support for seismic risk prevention.

There is a need to continue to work on strengthening the capacities of the key stakeholders that UNDP collaborates with to respond to unexpected climate change challenges and emergencies. UNDP should encourage further use of the knowledge management generated to reinforce its impact at different levels, emphasizing the role of local decision makers. There is also a need to prioritize the relevance of ensuring access to water, based on integrated management, in the face of future adverse climate change in UNDP's programmatic portfolio. UNDP should continue supporting Cuba in attracting funding sources with an emphasis on disaster risk prevention and mitigation, both for hurricanes and earthquakes. Regarding earthquakes, although the natural focus of intervention is on the east, the large level of urbanization and the extreme vulnerability of the Havana housing heritage constitute a very high risk. Effectively mitigating this risk could attract new donors and funds that support its safeguarding.

Recommendation 5: UNDP should leverage its convening capacity and the accumulated experience in the Cuban health sector, resulting from its extensive collaboration with Cuban authorities, key actors and the Global Fund, to strengthen and modernize other strategic areas of the national health system.

UNDP should continue to support national partners in the HIV response, while leveraging its expertise and networks to strengthen other areas of the health system, such as supply chains and information systems. In the theory of change of its next programme cycle, UNDP should consider different scenarios regarding the medium- to long-term continuity of the Global Fund as well as how to support Cuba's capacity to assume the levels of co-financing necessary to meet the objectives of the HIV response. UNDP should continue to support the consolidation of organized networks of key populations living with HIV. Strengthening the health system's network of legal professionals should reinforce its competence in addressing issues of discrimination and human rights and gender-related barriers affecting access to services.

The strengthening of the health system should be linked to areas in which UNDP has had experience in other sectoral fields, such as digital transformation. It should continue to promote the entry of new actors with the capacity to promote sectoral modernization, as has been the case with CABEL and its promotion of the bioindustry. Equally, UNDP should seek to deepen integrated approaches at the United Nations system level, building on the knowledge and added value provided by other agencies with specialized health mandates.

Recommendation 6: UNDP should further strengthen the gender mainstreaming capacity of its staff and take advantage of new public policy opportunities to accelerate closing the gender gap, dismantle the structural causes of gender inequalities and prevent and respond to gender-based violence. UNDP should strengthen the use of the rights-based approach, update metrics, and consider intersectionality with other population groups at risk of being left behind, at all stages of the programme cycle.

UNDP can build on the progress made in supporting the National Plan for the Advancement of Women. It should continue to leverage its local technical capacity, the regional network of experts and experiences, and communication resources and expertise in campaigns and the media. This is in order to maximize the potential of the newly created Gender Observatory, strengthen the generation and use of gender disaggregated data in the country, and support efforts against gender-based violence and violence in the home, the workplace and public places.

In designing the next country programme, UNDP should place more emphasis on the causes it identifies as the source of gender inequalities. It should analyse the impact of the unequal distribution of care in each programme area and continue paying special attention to the promotion of women's economic empowerment. UNDP should reinforce the mitigation of the differential impacts of climate change on women, for which the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment could play a key role. Finally, UNDP should continue leveraging its technical capacity to address intersectionality with other vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind, such as youth or older people.

3.3 Management Response

RECOMMENDATION 1.



UNDP should further promote digital transformation and mobilize financing for development in Cuba, working on greater inter-institutional and multilevel collaboration involving key ministries to support the country in the progress towards the achievement of PNDES 2030 targets and the SDGs. UNDP should place special emphasis on information systems, statistics, results-based management tools and the application of multidimensional methodologies to support decision-making and with a focus on key social policies.

Management response: Fully accepted



UNDP Cuba will continue to promote digital transformation as part of a comprehensive development approach, supporting the alignment of national priorities with territorial and sectoral interventions. In particular, the introduction of new technologies will continue to be promoted to improve institutional efficiency and access to services in key areas such as health, education, agriculture, environment, and risk reduction management. At the same time, in the initiatives identified, access to knowledge will continue to be facilitated and innovation, inclusion and gender equality will be promoted (from a rights and intersectionality approach), taking advantage of the potential of each territory.

In terms of resource mobilization, UNDP will continue to support the identification of niches to attract international financing, backed by its global institutional capacity and that of the Country Office and the trust generated with national counterparts and international cooperation actors.

UNDP will continue to support initiatives to measure multidimensional development in order to facilitate decision-making, a more efficient allocation of resources and the design of intervention strategies focused on vulnerable groups.

In response to the recommendation, the following specific key actions are identified:

◀ Recommendation 1 (suite)

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Continue promoting initiatives that support the strengthening of national capacities, through strategic alliances with key institutions such as the Ministry of Communications and the Scientific and Technological Park of Havana, for the development of digital applications and systems that favor digital transformation in Cuba, with the support of international partners.	September – December 2024	Country Office Management and Programme Unit	<p>UNDP has established a close working dialogue with key national counterparts, which favours the identification of priority issues for the purposes of international cooperation.</p> <p>With the support of UNDP, the Digital Readiness Assessment tool is being applied in the country, based on which additional information will be collected on the current status of the issue in Cuba, as a starting point to promote new initiatives with the support of international cooperation.</p>	In progress
1.2 Foster interaction with the “Digital Facility for the Caribbean” to obtain technical assistance, increase technical capabilities and knowledge within the office and for government actors, promote regional technical exchange and help catalyse new financing to promote transformation digital.	May 2024–2025	Country Office Management and Programme Unit	The office is consulting the government and making available the opportunities provided by the recently created Digital Facility for the Caribbean, as a regional integration platform that aims to provide technical assistance to the countries of the region and will facilitate the mobilization of resources and alliances to support the digital transition.	In progress
1.3 Continue developing initiatives, with the support of the global and regional network of UNDP experts, that support the country in identifying innovative alternatives for development financing and enhance access to multilateral development banks.	May 2024–2025	Country Office Management and Programme Unit	UNDP, in partnership with experts from the Sustainable Finance Hub and the Sustainable Energy Hub, is providing technical assistance to the Cuban government on issues such as development financing, financing for the energy transition and the modernization of public finances.	In progress

◀ Recommendation 1 (suite)

			<p>The BCC of Cuba has asked UNDP to act as the implementing agency for two projects financed by CABI (Central American Bank for Economic Integration): one project in progress to support the biopharmaceutical sector and another in formulation for strategic support to the banking sector. In turn, UNDP promotes, through its global networks, the integration of Cuba into other regional and subregional development banks.</p>	
<p>1.4 Continue promoting the transfer of multidimensional development measurement methodologies and tools that facilitate the effective targeting of public policies.</p>	<p>May 2024 - 2025</p>	<p>Country Office Management and Programme Unit</p>	<p>The capacities of national actors for multidimensional measurement continue to be strengthened, improving statistics and monitoring of the SDGs, with access to new methodologies and technical advice through the exchange of knowledge via South-South cooperation.</p>	<p>In progress</p>

RECOMMENDATION 2.



UNDP should leverage its strategic positioning and knowledge in terms of local development and productive transformation in the country in support of the government economic productivity agenda, considering existing capacity and area-based comparative advantages, to maximize the results and impacts of its interventions.

Management response: Fully accepted



UNDP will continue to support the decentralization process, particularly based on the lessons learned from the Articulated Platform for Integrated Territorial Development (PADIT), implemented by the organization itself. This platform has been key to improving the cohesion and impact of UNDP interventions at the local level and has been consolidated as a public policy for local development by being integrated into the National Economic and Social Development Plan, which has institutionalized the methodologies and tools developed by PADIT.

In parallel, UNDP will continue to facilitate the transfer of methodologies, technologies, innovations and digitalization processes to strengthen value chains, promoting import substitution and the development of exportable products.

Likewise, UNDP will continue to contribute to strengthening business capacities and to the coordination between the cooperative, private and state sectors, in order to improve the availability, access and consumption of food, in accordance with the diversity of demands and potential of the territories, thus contributing to both local development and exports.

Likewise, the implementation of affirmative measures and the development of enabling environments for the inclusion and empowerment of women and young people in Local Agri-Food Systems (LFS) will continue to be a priority.

In response to the recommendation, the following specific key actions are identified:

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Deepen support for the decentralization process by promoting the transition towards multidimensional and sustainable development models that are led by local governments and that aim for more effective local governance.	January 2024 – December 2030	Programme Unit - Governance and Productive Transformation Area	The implementation of the Sustainable Municipalities project, funded by the European Union, is beginning. Its aim is to promote sustainable agroecological and energy transition, as well as effective governance, through the coordination of public and private actors.	In progress

◀ Recommendation 2 (suite)

<p>2.2 To delve deeper into youth empowerment as a cross-cutting axis of Governance and Productive Transformation projects, drawing on experiences from the country office in working with women.</p>	<p>January 2024 – December 2030</p>	<p>Programme Unit - Areas of Governance and Productive Transformation and Gender</p>	<p>Lessons learned about gender-affirmative initiatives aimed at promoting the advancement of women have been shared with projects in implementation that will prioritize the empowerment of young people (Project Example: ALASS, MIPYMES, PADIT).</p>	<p>In progress</p>
			<p>An intersectional approach is being used to promote and substantially address youth work with a gender perspective and intergenerational links. In the analysis of economic incentives, policies are being proposed that work in common to prioritize women and young people (and young women).</p>	
<p>2.3 Continue supporting key economic actors (Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and public companies) and sectors such as banking and biopharmaceuticals through the mobilization of funds and technological innovation, in alliance with the Ministry of Economy and Planning, to promote public-private articulation in productive transformation.</p>	<p>January 2024 – December 2030</p>	<p>Management - Programme Unit - Areas of Governance and Productive Transformation</p>	<p>UNDP has been working in partnership with the Ministry of Economy and Planning (MEP) and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (MINCEX) to support productive transformation and public-private partnerships. In particular, priority is given to initiatives that promote innovation, the circular economy, women’s empowerment, and environmental sustainability and inclusion.</p>	<p>In progress</p>

RECOMMENDATION 3.



UNDP should further support the transition to a resilient and less carbon-intensive energy model for Cuba, leveraging both its capacity to attract development funding and its experience in promoting renewable energy infrastructure.

Management response: Fully accepted



In addition to the energy priorities defined in the national policy for the prospective development of renewable sources and energy efficiency (approved in 2014), which UNDP has been supporting with initiatives focused on the transfer of bioenergy technologies and improved energy access for communities isolated, during 2024 the alliance with the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM) has been reinforced and financing for the energy transition has been established as a work priority.

In mid-September of this year, Cuba presented its National Strategy for the Energy Transition, which defines economic-financial mechanisms as one of its enabling axes. Together with RBLAC, the Energy Hub and the CO experts, since the beginning of the year, technical assistance has been provided to generate a financial architecture proposal for the implementation of said Strategy. This includes new management instruments, such as the creation of a financial innovation laboratory, which allows the design and implementation of innovative financing solutions (includes exploring blended finance options, the opportunity for carbon credits and international mitigation mechanisms, incentives for development local, and regulatory frameworks, among others).

In response to the recommendation, the following specific key actions are identified:

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Agree with the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM) and implement UNDP technical assistance (Energy Hub + Field Office) on innovative financing modalities for the energy transition.	April – December 2024	Country Office Management, Programme Unit, Nature, Climate and Energy Area with support from the Country Office Program Analyst on Development Financing and in coordination with Energy Environment Team and Energy Hub.	Technical assistance is provided on an ongoing basis through expert missions to Cuba and has been well received by the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM) and the Central Bank of Cuba (BCC), with a high incidence at the political level.	In progress

◀ Recommendation 3 (suite)

<p>3.2 Increase the mobilization of resources to support the implementation of initiatives aligned with the priorities defined in the National Strategy for the energy transition in Cuba, in sectors and territories.</p>	<p>September – December 2024</p>	<p>Programme Unit, Areas of Nature, Climate and Energy and Productive Transformation</p>	<p>They are in the process of formulation and initiation of execution of various projects that contribute to efforts towards energy transition in Cuba.</p> <p>Joint project on sustainable municipalities that promotes the use of clean energy to boost agroecology. (in formulation / European Union - EU)</p> <p>Project supporting the energy transition in the Special Municipality of Isla de la Juventud. (Under implementation / Ministry of Environment and Energy Security of Italy - MASE)</p>	<p>In progress</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 4. 

In the areas of climate change resilience and disaster risk reduction, UNDP should continue promoting initiatives aimed at the rational and sustainable management of water resources, reinforcing water quality monitoring systems, and expanding the scope of its support for seismic risk prevention.

Management response: Fully accepted 

UNDP will continue to support capacity building in institutions, sectors, governments and communities with tools, innovations and instruments to improve resource management, natural resources, resilience to climate change and disaster risk reduction management. Innovative approaches that integrate gender and social inclusion dimensions and contribute to increasing resilience in urban and rural areas in vulnerable environments will continue to be encouraged.

At the same time, work will continue on strengthening hydrometeorological early warning systems, transferring technologies to improve the water distribution system to the population and key economic sectors, as well as raising awareness among the population regarding the rational and efficient use of water.

In response to the recommendation, the following specific key actions are identified:

◀ Recommendation 4 (suite)

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Continue promoting integrated water management by strengthening hydrometeorological Early Warning Systems to mitigate droughts and improve decision-making in the face of extreme events, updating management instruments to support risk governance.	September 2024 – January 2025	Programme Unit, Resilience Areas, Risk Reduction Management and Nature, Climate and Energy	Progress is being made in the implementation of the Euroclima project that supports preparation, response, prevention and adaptation to the risks of droughts and floods. Resource mobilization continues: The second round of dialogue on the Euroclima Programme for Disaster Risk Reduction is underway.	In progress
4.2 Continue promoting the integration of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation into territorial development strategies to improve comprehensive risk management at the local and sectoral levels	September – December 2024	Programme Unit, Resilience Areas, Risk Reduction Management and Nature, Climate and Energy	The fourth phase of an initiative is being developed with the support of the Regional Centre and the UNDP Crisis Bureau, which integrates both themes.	In progress
4.3 Work on the action plan for prevention and preparation for response and recovery in the event of an earthquake, considering the situation of the housing stock in Havana.	January 2024 – December 2026	Programme Unit, and Resilience Area, Management for Risk Reduction	Proposals for future financing are being formulated.	In progress
4.4 Strengthen national and territorial capacities for monitoring terrestrial waters, in particular saline intrusion resulting from the impacts of climate change.	January 2024 – December 2026	Programme Unit, Nature, Climate and Energy Area	The Mi Costa project provides a significant number of cutting-edge technologies, methodologies and knowledge to strengthen the country's capacity to monitor and monitor the quality of terrestrial waters. (under implementation / Green Climate Fund - GCF).	In progress

RECOMMENDATION 5.

UNDP should leverage its convening capacity and the accumulated experience in the Cuban health sector, resulting from its extensive collaboration with Cuban authorities, key actors and the Global Fund, to strengthen and modernize other strategic areas of the national health system.

Management response: Fully accepted

UNDP will continue to work to expand its collaboration on HIV, Health and Development, building on its mandate to support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. UNDP will leverage its unique positioning to support progress towards universal access to health, addressing its social, economic and environmental determinants, drawing on a broad set of expertise to connect the dots across sectors and partners.

In this way, in collaboration with national health authorities and other agencies of the United Nations System, efforts will be made to expand the provision of health supplies to guarantee access to health treatments and technologies, and technical assistance will be provided to ensure that the principles of gender equality, human rights and good governance are integrated into the design and implementation of health programmes and policies. It will also provide innovative solutions such as digital platforms for health and address the challenges of supply chains and health financing.

UNDP will continue to support an enabling environment for the national response to HIV, strengthening preparedness for pandemics and other health emergencies, and strengthening the biopharmaceutical industry, including modernizing its infrastructure and training Cuban scientists in new lines of research and scientific cooperation at the highest level.

In response to the recommendation, the following specific key actions are identified:

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Define a programmatic offer to strengthen UNDP's work in Health and Development for 2025-2030, aligned with the theory of change of the next Country Programme Document (CPD).	April 2025	Programme Unit and Health and Development Area	This offer will integrate traditional areas of work with more innovative ones such as the modernization of the biopharmaceutical industry, supply chains, digitalization in health, and financing for development.	In progress
5.2 Establish a plan to strengthen alliances and coordination with national actors, United Nations agencies, donors and other key actors, aligned with the programmatic offer in Health and Development, for a greater impact of UNDP's work in this area.	June 2025	Country Office Management, Programme Unit and Health and Development Area	-	In progress

RECOMMENDATION 6.



UNDP should further strengthen the gender mainstreaming capacity of its staff and take advantage of new public policy opportunities to accelerate closing the gender gap, dismantle the structural causes of gender inequalities and prevent and respond to gender-based violence. UNDP should strengthen the use of the rights-based approach, update metrics, and consider intersectionality with other population groups at risk of being left behind, at all stages of the programme cycle.

Management response: Fully accepted



During the current Country Programme, the Office has promoted the use of the Gender Results Evaluation Scorecard (GRES) tool to improve planning and documentation of gender equality results. In 2024, the Office celebrates its 10th anniversary of gold certification in the Gender Equality Seal, reaffirming its commitment and strengthening partnerships to achieve gender-transformative results.

UNDP will continue to mobilize resources to accelerate transformative results, which require time due to the nature of gender relations. Work will continue on this and on prioritizing the economic empowerment of women in strategic sectors of the country's development.

UNDP, in alliance with national counterparts and cooperation partners, and taking advantage of the strengthening of regulations and policies between 2020-2024 Regarding gender and other social factors, will continue to advocate for the new United Nations Cooperation Framework and the Country Programme in Cuba to prioritize attention to social inequalities. In addition, it will strengthen the Gender in Development approach, integrating rights, intersectionality, and social inclusion, with special attention to groups at risk of being left behind.

In response to the recommendation, the following specific key actions are identified:

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Continue working with UNDP staff, national and local counterparts, and technical partners to drive and document transformational gender changes that impact structural inequalities and promote the inclusion of people and groups at risk of being left behind.	January 2025 - December 2030	Gender and Programme Unit	The spaces for gender advocacy and training include the analysis of the GRES tool and the intersectional approach, identifying new actions and commitments by counterparts to achieve more gender-transformative results. The communication campaign on the 10 years of the Gold Seal in PUND-Cuba, which is in full design, highlights in its axes the gender-transformational changes achieved and others to be strengthened.	In progress

◀ Recommendation 6 (suite)

<p>6.2 Continue mobilizing financial resources to, with an intersectional and rights-based approach, promote the closing of gaps between men and women, fostering co-responsibility in care, generating quality data, transforming sexist stereotypes and responding to gender violence.</p>	<p>October 2024 - December 2030</p>	<p>Gender and Programme Unit</p>	<p>The progress in the construction of the policy of the National System for the Comprehensive Care of Life in Cuba and the support of the UNDP for its implementation is already being positioned in projects such as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and others in negotiation (new economic actors). UNDP has reinforced in the processes of building the new cooperation framework substantive aspects to prioritize support for the National Programme for the Advancement of Women, the Comprehensive Strategy for the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence and Violence in the Family, the National Programme against Racism and Racial Discrimination.</p>	<p>In progress</p>
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* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

ANNEXES



Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the Evaluation Resource Centre website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/24245>

Annex 1. Evaluation terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation framework

Annex 3. List of projects reviewed

Annex 4. Documents consulted

Annex 5. Stakeholders consulted

Annex 6. Country Programme Performance Rating

Annex 7. Status of CPD outcome and output indicators

Annex 8. Maps



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