



Independent  
Evaluation  
Office

United Nations Development Programme

# SYNTHESIS OF UNDP EVALUATIONS IN THE SAHEL 2014-2021





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# FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the synthesis of UNDP evaluations conducted in the Sahel, which reflects on the findings and lessons regarding UNDP performance in the region between 2014 and 2021.

Over this period, UNDP undertook more than 180 project and country programme evaluations in the ten countries covered by the United Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). The wealth of information provided by this set of evaluations offers a unique opportunity to reflect collectively on UNDP work in the region, and inform implementation of the new UNDP regional strategy “UNDP Sahel Offer – A Regeneration”, especially in light of the continuously evolving and intensifying development challenges of the region.

The report is organized along the UNISS pillars, as a way to systematize and better understand the UNDP response to system-wide priorities. It synthesizes the effectiveness of UNDP, the factors influencing its performance, and the likely sustainability of results. The report is conceived as a knowledge product, to capture and consolidate evidence and lessons learned on common issues and solutions across the Sahel countries, for further reflection on UNDP strategic directions, priorities and approaches. The synthesis reinforces the critical role evaluations play in strengthening transparency and accountability, with further emphasis on enhancing feedback loops to enhance organizational performance.

The synthesis has been able to identify several programme- and policy-related lessons. These include, among others, lessons on integrated programming, stakeholder engagement in the design and implementation of downstream interventions, and the scale-up of interventions. The issues identified for further consideration highlight strategic areas for UNDP in the Sahel, such as governance, stabilization, peacebuilding and climate change adaptation. These are areas where UNDP has a key role to support short- and long-term capacity, access to sustainable livelihood solutions, finance and energy, within the framework of cross-border programming, which is a comparative advantage of UNDP in the region.

While the focus of this synthesis report is on UNDP work in the Sahel region, I am confident that the lessons and areas for further consideration identified will resonate across the organization, and provide valuable inputs to the design of upcoming UNDP programmes and interventions for more inclusive and sustainable development results.



**Oscar A. Garcia**

**Director**

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# ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABS</b>	Access and benefit sharing
<b>ADR</b>	Assessment of Development Results
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>DCPE</b>	Decentralized Country Programme Evaluation
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>FAO</b>	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>ICPE</b>	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
<b>ICPR</b>	Independent Country Programme Review
<b>IEO</b>	Independent Evaluation Office (UNDP)
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GEWE</b>	Gender equality and women's empowerment
<b>Global Fund</b>	Global Fund for Tuberculosis, AIDS and Malaria
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>MFI</b>	Microfinance institution
<b>MFP</b>	Multifunctional platform
<b>PBF</b>	United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNISS</b>	United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>UNSPS</b>	United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel



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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Evaluations are tools to inform strategic decisions, improve programme design and delivery, and increase institutional performance.<sup>1</sup> As evaluation functions have developed over time, so has the number of evaluations (project, programme or other types) conducted by organizations every year. This calls for strong knowledge management to support the dissemination and utilization of evaluation findings and results.

With this in mind, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed an office-wide evaluation strategy, which emphasizes knowledge management and enhancing the utility of the hundreds of evaluations completed within UNDP every year, notably through regional and subregional evaluation syntheses for its 2022-2025 programme of work.<sup>2</sup> An evaluation synthesis can be broadly defined as a systematic procedure to organize the integration of existing evaluative knowledge and findings on a given topic from disparate evaluation studies, to increase the applicability of these findings and develop new knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

The present evaluation synthesis report is drawn from evaluations conducted by UNDP in the Sahel region between 2014 and 2021, covering the ten countries included in the United Nations definition of the region (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger and Senegal). This evaluation synthesis exercise followed the completion of a thematic evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries presented to the UNDP Executive Board in early 2021, which found scope for UNDP programmes in the Sahel to adopt more comprehensive strategies to address the compartmentalization of its crisis responses and the underfunding of its programmes in the region.<sup>4</sup> This synthesis exercise also coincided with the review of UNDP Sahel strategy developed in 2014 and the launch of a revised UNDP Sahel Offer in 2021, which aimed to accelerate and scale up its support in light of the deteriorating development and humanitarian crises in the region, and in line with the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS).

While this synthesis primarily seeks to inform UNDP managers and staff in the Sahel region, the insights are also expected to have value for UNDP staff and management in headquarters and other regions. Considering the broad nature of the lessons, it is hoped that the synthesis may also be of interest to a wider group of external stakeholders and development partners working in the region.

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

2 A first regional synthesis published by the IEO earlier in 2021 covered the territory of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC).

3 Definition adapted from the Environmental Science and Policy Journal, Volume 86, August 2018; and from the United States General Office of Accountability, The evaluation synthesis, 1992.

4 See DP/2021.9.

## 1.2 THE SAHEL REGION

The Sahel is a vast ecoregion of semi-arid areas that spans from the western (Atlantic) to the eastern (Red Sea) coasts of Africa, separating the Sahara Desert to the north from the tropical savannas to the south. Based on the United Nations definition, the Sahel region is composed of ten countries located in western and central Africa (Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal),<sup>5</sup> and is home to about 30 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>6</sup>

The Sahel is endowed with extensive natural resources, but has remained one of the poorest regions in Africa and the world due to its geography, climate and violent conflicts. Four out of ten countries in the region (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger) are in the bottom ten countries in the Human Development Index.<sup>7</sup> 80 percent of the population of the Sahel lives in extreme poverty, with less than US\$ 1.90 per day.<sup>8</sup> Six of the ten countries are classified as fragile and conflict-affected, with severe and multidimensional humanitarian and security crises (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria).<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that almost 29 million Sahelians needed assistance and protection in 2021.<sup>10</sup>

The crisis in the Sahel region builds on structural vulnerabilities which include weak states, poverty, pre-existing community tensions and environmental changes.<sup>11</sup> Over recent decades, the Sahel region has experienced severe climate events leading to famine crises. Between 1970 and 1993, the region recorded 20 years of severe droughts, which, combined with population growth and unsustainable resource exploitation, have accelerated desertification and land degradation, now affecting 80 percent of the region's land.<sup>12</sup>

The countries in the region are diverse in their development typologies and size, including ten least-developed four low middle-income, and four landlocked developing countries. However, they show common weaknesses in their economies, characterized by a lack of diversification contributing to low productivity and competitiveness, low levels of global and regional trade integration, and dependency on commodity exports (agricultural and mining), making them prone to external shocks. With the exception of Nigeria and the Gambia, the agricultural sector is the largest provider of jobs in all Sahel countries, with most of this employment being informal.<sup>13</sup> In 2020, the average unemployment

5 Other definitions of the Sahel include parts of 14 countries extending to the Horn of Africa including: northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, the extreme south of Algeria, Niger, the Extreme north of Nigeria, the extreme north of Cameroon and Central African Republic, central Chad, central and southern Sudan, the extreme north of South Sudan, Eritrea and the extreme north of Ethiopia.

6 Based on World Bank Data, 2019.

7 Human Development Index, 2020.

8 See World Bank (2020) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2020/12/16/the-world-bank-can-only-accomplish-its-mission-of-ending-extreme-poverty-in-africa-by-prioritizing-the-sahel-region>.

9 Based on World Bank classification.

10 UNOCHA (2021) Sahel Crises Humanitarian overview.

11 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020) From the Malian crisis to the Sahel breakdown: An overview of SIPRI's work in the G5 Sahel region. <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2020/malian-crisis-sahel-breakdown-overview-sipri-work-g5-sahel-region>.

12 Africa Renewal (2013) The Sahel: One region, many crises. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/sahel-one-region-many-crises>.

13 UNECA. Sahel 2043: towards a resilient, inclusive and prosperous Sahel region.

rate across the ten Sahel countries (7.8 percent) was higher than the sub-Saharan African average (6.6 percent). Energy demand has increased by more than 4 percent per year in the Sahel over the past two decades, due to population and economic growth. While the region has enormous potential for renewable energy, access to energy remains limited, with *per capita* energy consumption at one-tenth of the world average and half of the average in sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa).<sup>14</sup> With two-thirds of its population in rural areas, bioenergy is the most used energy source in the Sahel (with the exception of Mauritania and Senegal), with the mining sector as the main energy consumer.

Women and youth are most affected by unemployment in the subregion, with between 28 and 68 percent of the youth population not in education, employment or training.<sup>15</sup> Women's empowerment is hindered by social norms, harmful traditional practices and persistent gender stereotypes, as well as the low educational attainment of women and girls across the subregion, further accentuating gender gaps in access to opportunities and human capital development.<sup>16</sup> Child marriage is highly prevalent, with over half of young women in the Sahel married in childhood.<sup>17</sup> Two of the countries (Mali and Guinea) are among the six in the world with the highest prevalence of forced child marriage, and all ten Sahel countries are among the 29 countries that account for most the cases of female genital mutilation.<sup>18</sup> Gender equality indicators are among the worst in the world, with all ten countries in the bottom quarter of UNDP Gender Inequality Index, and five (Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Niger) in the bottom ten.

Sahel countries are considered the most vulnerable to climate change in Africa. Temperatures in the Sahel are expected to rise 1.5 times faster than the global average, presenting significant threats to its already vulnerable ecological environment and the two-thirds of the region's population which depends on agriculture and livestock. Climate change is disrupting already fragile livelihoods with adverse impacts on security in the Sahel, with intercommunal tensions and conflicts between pastoralist communities and farmers fuelled by competition for access to available land and water for cultivation and pasture. In 2020 alone, exceptionally severe seasonal floods affected more than 1.7 million people, resulting in the destruction of houses, goods, crops and fields, and the degradation of land, and threatening the livelihoods of communities that mainly rely on agriculture.<sup>19</sup>

Regional political instability, inequalities and structural weaknesses in governance systems have created an enabling environment for the eruption of armed and terrorist groups in the region. Emerging in Mali in 2012, violent conflict has gradually extended to neighbouring countries, particularly Burkina Faso, Niger and the Lake Chad Basin countries (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria), marking a rise in violent extremism and increasing operations of non-state armed actors. Despite regional and international military interventions, the security situation and protection needs in the central Sahel have significantly degraded, causing human losses, disrupting cross-border trade and traditional migration routes, and further exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. In 2020, nearly 2,440 civilian deaths were recorded in

14 <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/e41015b1-4399-4635-a95a-d6769d0f319a/CleanEnergyTransitionsintheSahel.pdf>

15 World Bank World Development Indicators for the period 2017-2019. Data was not available for Cameroon and Guinea for this period.

16 Alliance Sahel (2021) Gender equality and women's empowerment: a unique opportunity for the Sahel.

17 UNICEF (2020) Child marriage in the Sahel.

18 UNICEF. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change.

19 UNOCHA (2021) Humanitarian needs and requirements overview- Sahel Crisis April 2021.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger alone, compared to 356 in 2017. Forced displacement due to violence affected nearly two million people in those countries.<sup>20</sup> Security incidents are estimated to have increased by 114 percent between 2018 and 2020, increasing the access challenges for humanitarian and development assistance.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of these compounding and cascading vulnerabilities, an estimated 4.2 million people across the region have been in situations of displacement. More than 11 million people in the Sahel face the threat of famine, with 40 percent of children under the age of five facing stunted growth.<sup>22</sup> The increasing vulnerability of rural populations, insecurity and conflict over resources is disrupting social cohesion, worsening the crisis. In 2020, hardship conditions in the Sahel countries were exacerbated by the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which significantly affected the already fragile health systems and people. The number of people living in extreme poverty is projected to increase by more than 1.3 million in 2020, and the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 risk wiping out five years of development gains across the Sahel.<sup>23</sup> Gender-based violence, already endemic in the region, further increased as COVID-related movement restrictions exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and hampered access to services for survivors.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.3 UNDP PROGRAMMES IN THE SAHEL

In 2012, in response to the deteriorating situation in Mali and its spill-over in the region, the United Nations launched a system-wide regional strategy based on Security Council Resolution 2056. The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel focuses on ten countries of central and western Sahel (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal). The strategy focuses on three priority areas: governance, security and resilience. UNDP co-leads the governance pillar with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), but also works with other agencies on renewable energy and youth employment.<sup>25</sup>

In 2018, UNISS was complemented by the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSPS) with the "overarching goal to scale up efforts to accelerate shared prosperity and lasting peace in the Sahel countries and the region at-large by implementing priorities to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the African Union Agenda 2063".<sup>26</sup> The UNSP aims to provide fresh impetus to UNISS implementation, and was conceived as an instrument to promote coherence and coordination within the framework of UNISS through six areas of focus: cross-border cooperation, climate action, crisis prevention, women and youth empowerment, economic revitalization and renewable energy.

20 Sahel People Coalition report, 2021.

21 UNOCHA (2021) Humanitarian needs and requirements overview- Sahel Crisis April 2021.

22 World Bank (2020) Opinion: The World Bank can only accomplish its mission of ending extreme poverty in Africa by prioritizing the Sahel region: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2020/12/16/the-world-bank-can-only-accomplish-its-mission-of-ending-extreme-poverty-in-africa-by-prioritizing-the-sahel-region>.

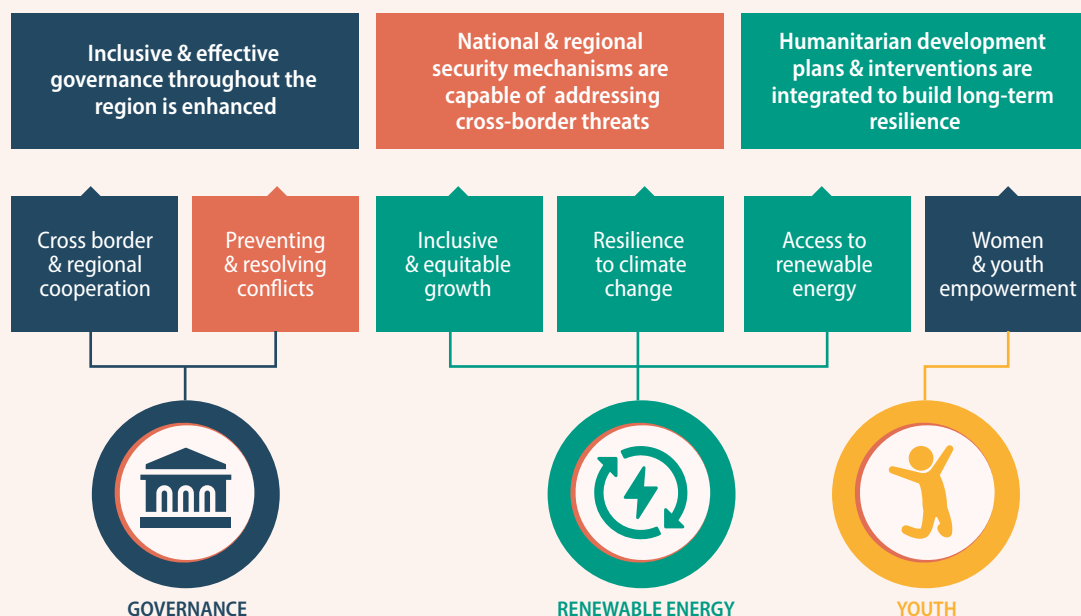
23 Ibid.

24 UNHCR (2020) Sahel Crisis Response, progress report January-September.

25 UNDP (2021) Sahel Offer.

26 United Nations (2018) Summary: UN Support Plan for the Sahel: [https://unowas.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english\\_summary\\_report.pdf](https://unowas.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english_summary_report.pdf).

**FIGURE 1:**  
UNISS and UNSP priority areas, and the UNDP Sahel Offer



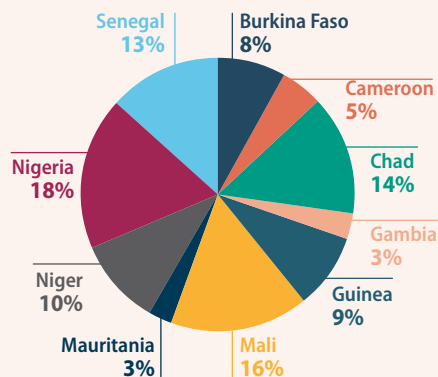
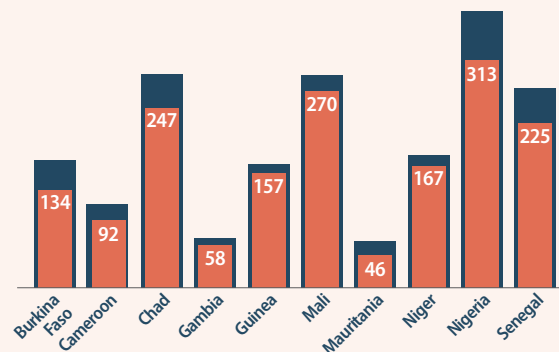
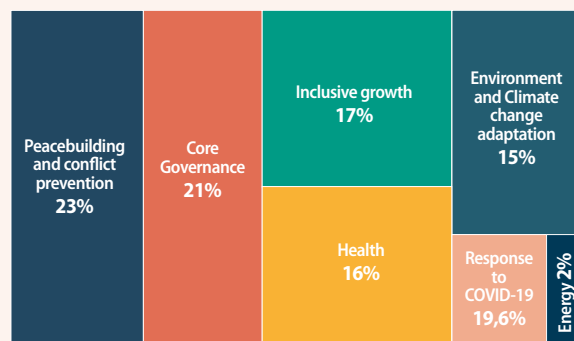
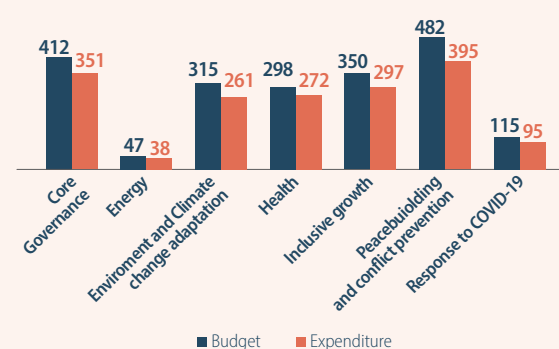
Source: UNDP Sahel Offer 2021

In 2014, UNDP launched a specific strategy for the Sahel to articulate its role and contribution to the implementation of UNISS, focusing on six countries in west and central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal).<sup>27</sup> The strategy focused on five areas:

- i. Democratic governance and security, and strengthening the monitoring capacity of civil society;
- ii. Strengthening and deepening regional economic and security cooperation;
- iii. Strengthening poverty reduction policies and programmes;
- iv. Reinforcement of resilience mechanisms and capacity; and
- v. Promoting communication and strengthening knowledge sharing.

27 UNDP (2014) Support Framework for the Implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel -towards sustainable and inclusive human development.



**FIGURE 2:**  
UNDP programme share by country in the  
Sahel 2014-21**FIGURE 3:**  
UNDP programme budget and expenditure in  
the Sahel countries 2014-21 (US\$ million)**FIGURE 4:**  
UNDP programme in the Sahel by  
theme, 2014-21**FIGURE 5:**  
UNDP programme in the Sahel 2014-  
21 (US\$ million)

Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022

Since 2014, UNDP has delivered programmes worth \$1.7 billion in the ten Sahel countries, with Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad accounting for 62 percent of total programme expenditure (Figure 2). Bilateral and multilateral funds were the largest funding sources (37 percent) for the 2014-2021 UNDP programme in the Sahel, followed by UNDP core resources (22 percent), vertical funds (22 percent) and government cost-sharing (17 percent). Key donors included the Global Fund for Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Malaria (Global Fund) (13 percent), the Government of Senegal (10 percent), the European Commission (9 percent), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (8 percent), the Government of Japan (5 percent), and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) (4 percent).

UNDP assistance aligns with the national development plans of the ten countries, and covers a range of thematic areas classified by IEO under the following seven intervention areas:

- i. Core governance;
- ii. Peacebuilding and conflict prevention;
- iii. Environment and climate change adaptation;
- iv. Energy;
- v. Inclusive growth;
- vi. Health; and
- vii. Support to the COVID-19 response emerging in 2020.

Peacebuilding and conflict prevention and core governance have been largest areas of UNDP work across the ten countries, with 23 percent and 21 percent respectively of the total programme delivered during 2014-2021 (Figures 3 and 4). They are followed by inclusive growth (17 percent), health (16 percent), environment and climate change adaptation (15 percent), the COVID-19 response (6 percent) and energy (2 percent).

The level of programmatic engagement has varied across the ten countries, reflecting different national priorities and UNDP positioning in each country.

- In the area of **peacebuilding and conflict prevention**, Nigeria has the largest programme with 33 percent of the total expenditure, followed by Mali (17 percent), Niger (11 percent) and Cameroon (10 percent), with the remaining countries having under 10 percent of the region's portfolio. Although Burkina Faso has been heavily affected by extremist attacks during the period, and remains one of the most affected countries in the region, the UNDP peacebuilding and conflict prevention portfolio in Burkina Faso represented just 7 percent of total programme expenditure, lower than Guinea (8 percent).
- In the area of **governance**, six countries accounted for about 80 percent of expenditure between 2014 and 2021: Nigeria (20 percent), Mali (19 percent), Burkina Faso (15 percent), Niger (13 percent) and Guinea (12 percent).
- About 58 percent of expenditure associated with **inclusive growth** programming pertained to one large programme implemented in Senegal.<sup>28</sup>
- **Health**-related interventions account for 16 percent of total programme expenditure, and are mainly implemented in Chad (61 percent), Mali (26 percent) and Guinea (11 percent), with 79 percent of expenditure coming from Global Fund operations.
- The **environment and climate change** portfolio is the most broadly spread across the ten countries,<sup>29</sup> with the largest proportion implemented in Mali (22 percent).

28 The "Programme d'Urgence de Développement Communautaire" implemented in Senegal accounted for 93 percent of the inclusive growth portfolio in Senegal, which represented 62 percent of the total inclusive growth portfolio in the region.

29 See Annex: programme share by country.

- The **energy** portfolio was mainly implemented in Niger (28 percent), Nigeria (27 percent) and Mali (12 percent).
- With the outbreak of the **COVID-19** pandemic, the equivalent of 6 percent of overall programme expenditure between 2014 and 2021 was disbursed to support national responses to COVID-19, mainly implemented in two countries: Nigeria (55 percent) and Cameroon (22 percent). Together, these two countries accounted for 77 percent of COVID-19 related programme expenditure.

To reflect the evolving context and adoption of the UNSP, in May 2021 UNDP launched a new strategy for the subregion, the Sahel Offer 2020. This focuses UNDP interventions on three priority areas aligned with the UNSP and UNISS: i) governance; ii) renewable energy; and iii) youth. This new offer is expected to serve as a strategic guide for the development of interventions across the Sahel, with a differentiated approach in conflict-affected, at-risk or post-conflict areas, and classic development programming in areas unaffected by conflict or violent extremism. Through this offer, and in line with its development integrator role, UNDP seeks to create fresh momentum for development in the region, and galvanize an estimated \$3.62 billion of investment from development partners during the period 2021-2025.

## 1.4 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The overall purpose of this subregional synthesis study is to complement existing IEO evaluation products, and continue strengthening evaluative feedback and learning loops, to support evidence-based decision-making. The results of this synthesis are expected to promote programmatic learning based on past UNDP performance, and thus support current programmatic efforts as the organization pursues the operationalization of its new Sahel Offer.

The specific objectives of the synthesis are:

1. **To identify and extract available evaluative evidence on UNDP performance in the Sahel**, specifically in the areas of climate change adaptation, governance, economic inclusion and energy (what worked, what did not work and under what circumstances).
2. **To formulate lessons and good practices to improve overall UNDP performance** in its programmes in the Sahel.
3. **To generate knowledge and insights on the performance of UNDP** and draw potential programming trends to inform UNDP strategies in the Sahel.

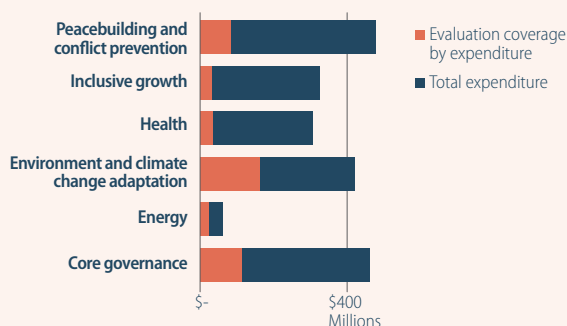
The scope of the synthesis is bounded by the evaluations available for the region and time period covered. The synthesis covers all centralized and decentralized evaluations of the ten Sahel countries during the UNDP strategic plan periods of 2014-2017 and 2018-2021. As of February 2022, 188 decentralized evaluations and eight independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) covering seven countries, were available and consulted.<sup>30</sup> The majority of decentralized evaluations (78 percent) were project evaluations, with 17 percent outcome or thematic evaluations and United Nations

30 ICPEs (previously Assessment of Development Results, or ADRs) consulted were: Burkina Faso 2020, Chad 2021, Cameroon 2017 and 2020, Guinea 2022, Mali 2020, Mauritania 2016 and Nigeria 2021.

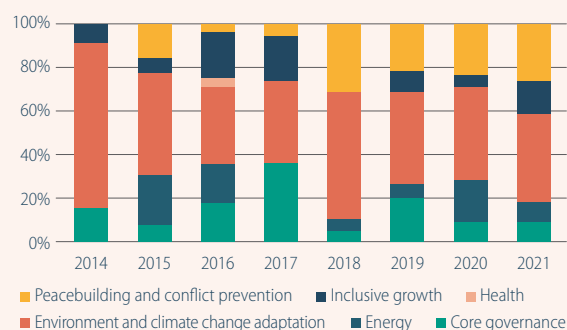
Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations, and 5 percent decentralized country programme evaluations (DCPEs).

The sample for more in-depth analysis and coding included between 10 and 39 evaluations for each of the ten countries, with the highest number of evaluations available from Mali and Burkina Faso (39 and 31 respectively). All countries were covered by an independent (IEO-led) or decentralized (mid-term or final) country programme evaluation during the period under review.

**FIGURE 6:**  
Coverage by project evaluations in the ten  
Sahel countries (2014-21)



**FIGURE 7:**  
Decentralized evaluation thematic coverage  
2014-21



Setting aside country programme and outcome evaluations, the available decentralized project evaluations covered about \$450 million of programmatic expenditure between 2014 and 2021, or 26 percent of UNDP programme expenditure during this period. Project evaluations cover all thematic areas of the UNDP signature solutions. Evaluation coverage relative to total expenditure for the period was highest in the environment and climate change area (36 percent), followed by governance (25 percent), peacebuilding (19 percent), health (8 percent), inclusive growth (7 percent) and energy (5 percent).<sup>31</sup> 66 percent of decentralized evaluations for the period were quality-assured through the IEO annual quality assessment of decentralized evaluations, of which 74 percent were rated satisfactory to moderately satisfactory, meaning that they fully met UNDP requirements, or partially with a number of shortcomings.<sup>32</sup> The country average for quality ranges between moderately unsatisfactory to moderately satisfactory (3-4), indicating that at country level, on average, UNDP evaluation requirements were either partially met, or not met.

31 Many projects in the area of environment and climate change were funded by GEF, which mandates project evaluations.

32 IEO conducts an annual quality assessment of a sample of decentralized evaluations using a 6 point scale: Highly satisfactory, meets and exceeds UNDP requirements; Satisfactory, fully meets UNDP requirements with minor shortcomings; Moderately satisfactory, partially meeting UNDP requirements with a number of shortcomings; Moderately unsatisfactory, more than one parameter was unmet with significant shortcomings; Unsatisfactory, most parameters were not met and there were major shortcomings; and Highly Unsatisfactory, none of the parameters were met and there were severe shortcomings.

## 1.5 SYNTHESIS APPROACH AND METHODS

The synthesis followed a three-step methodology:

1. A desk-based portfolio analysis of UNDP programmes in the ten Sahel countries, based on project data and annual results reports.
2. Careful coding of all evaluations in the selected sample using specialist qualitative analysis software (NVivo), using a set of codes and nodes that allowed the grouping of insights by thematic area of work, type of intervention, explanatory factor, and other variables.
3. Iterative analysis of common, recurring patterns in the coded content, within and across thematic areas, country contexts, intervention types and characteristics and other factors.

The resulting insights were collated and are presented in two blocks of lessons learned:<sup>33</sup> by key UNDP thematic areas of work; and by cross-cutting aspects of UNDP institutional performance.

### 1.5.1 Limitations

As a desk-based exercise, the synthesis covers evidence of UNDP performance from evaluations, and as such could not capture recent and ongoing initiatives and interventions that have not been evaluated, including the COVID-19 pandemic response. In addition, there has been limited evaluation coverage of regional programmes implemented by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa.

Secondly, the thematic and country coverage of project and programme evaluations has been uneven, with the exception of GEF programming. Evaluations do not cover all thematic areas, countries and time periods equally, and vary significantly in their level of detail and reporting of primary data sources on the performance of UNDP interventions. For instance, about half of the project evaluations in the sample cover the 'ecosystems and biodiversity' sub-theme, which represents less than 17 percent of expenditure over the period. Similarly, health-related expenditure, which represented 16 percent of total programme expenditure in the region for the period covered, did not get sufficient evaluation coverage to be considered in the report.

To maintain the integrity of the scope of this regional synthesis, the synthesis used all available UNDP evaluations, irrespective of their IEO quality assessment rating. Higher-quality evaluations were prioritized, but complemented and triangulated with lesser quality and unassessed evaluations. This enabled thematic aggregation and the identification of emerging insights across all evaluations. The observations and findings presented in this report are not generalized to all the countries in the region, but are formulated through triangulation of country cases and evaluation types over time. As the sample of available evaluations was primarily at project level, it has not always been possible to capture incremental changes over time, though in some cases independent and decentralized country programme evaluations enabled the diversification of evaluation sources for the same interventions.

33 As per the OECD Development Assistance Committee Glossary, 'lessons learned' can be defined as "Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact".



# 02

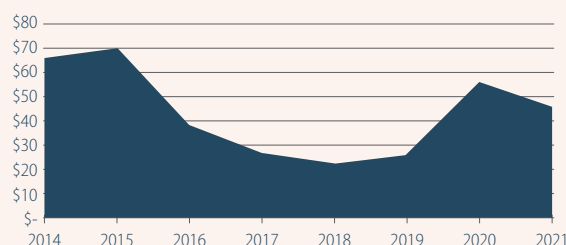
## **CHAPTER 2** **SYNTHESIS FINDINGS** **AND INSIGHTS**

The following section presents key findings emerging from the synthesis of UNDP evaluations in the Sahel, organized by thematic area. Findings for each thematic area are presented against the main strategic goal of the United Nations Integrated Sahel Strategy (UNISS). Two of the three priority areas covered by the UNDP Sahel Offer, governance and youth, are presented under the first UNISS strategic goal of enhancing inclusive and effective governance throughout the region. UNISS goal 2, to support the capacity of national and regional security mechanisms, covers UNDP interventions on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Finally, three areas of work, namely inclusive and equitable growth, resilience to climate change and access to renewable energy, are included under the third UNISS strategic goal on building long-term resilience through the integration of humanitarian and development plans. Figure 1, presented in Chapter 1, provides an overview of the alignment between UNISS, UNSPP and the revised UNDP Sahel Offer.

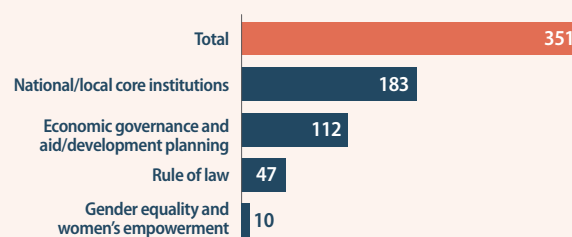
## 2.1 UNISS Strategic Goal 1: Inclusive and effective governance throughout the region is enhanced

### A. Governance

**FIGURE 8:**  
Trend in governance expenditure Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)



**FIGURE 9:**  
Programme expenditure on governance Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)



Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022



Strengthening democracy and good governance has historically been at the core of the UNDP mandate. Inclusive and effective democratic governance was one of the three pillars of its 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, one of the six signature solutions under the UNDP 2018-2021 and 2022-2025 strategic plans and a key pillar of UNISS, although it was less visible in the 2017 UNSPS.<sup>34</sup> In the 2021 UNDP Sahel Offer, it was once again elevated to one of the three main pillars for UNDP in the region.

During the period under review, UNDP programming in the area of core governance can be broken down into four areas:

- 1 Strengthening core national and local institutions through a combination of capacity development and technical assistance, including electoral and democratic institutions such as electoral commissions and legislatures;
- 2 Strengthening economic governance and development planning, data and statistics, coordination, policy development and monitoring;
- 3 Strengthening the rule of law, access to justice, and the fight against corruption; and
- 4 Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).<sup>35</sup>

In total, UNDP spent a total of \$351 million on governance between 2014 and 2021, 21 percent of its total programming expenditure in the Sahel. With a budget of \$412 million in this area, this corresponds to an execution rate of 85 percent. With the exception of Nigeria, governance programming in the Sahel region is largely implemented in low-income countries which are fragile and conflict-affected (Mali 19 percent; Burkina Faso 15 percent; Niger 13 percent; and Guinea 12 percent) with limited intervention in middle-income countries (Cameroon 2 percent; Senegal 2 percent; and Mauritania 4 percent).<sup>36</sup>

**FINDING 1. UNDP has been a significant contributor to electoral processes in the Sahel. UNDP effectiveness in implementing electoral cycle approaches has been challenged due to the fluid political context surrounding elections in the countries.**

In line with its mandate as the main United Nations implementing body for support to strengthening electoral institutions, legal frameworks and processes, and support to elections outside of the peacekeeping or post-conflict context, UNDP plays an historic and unique role in the delivery of electoral assistance programmes.<sup>37</sup> While the nature of electoral assistance and the contexts of the ten Sahel countries have evolved over time, UNDP has supported electoral assistance programmes in all ten Sahel countries over the last decade.

34 The term did not appear explicitly amongst the six priority areas, although key aspects of governance (institutional strengthening and rule of law) were sub-objectives of the first and second priority, respectively.

35 Peacebuilding, risk management, and resilience are considered a separate thematic area below, though they are, in practice, interconnected.

36 Nigeria has the largest governance portfolio, with 20 percent of total governance programme expenditure, but this was driven by two large programmes of electoral support (capacity for governance programming) and economic planning support (equitable and sustainable economic growth), which accounted for 78 percent of the country's governance portfolio over the review period.

37 For a summary of United Nations election support, see: [https://dppa.un.org/en/elections#Requesting %20Assistance](https://dppa.un.org/en/elections#Requesting%20Assistance).

Evaluations in several countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria) highlight that UNDP was instrumental in ensuring that electoral processes could take place, and identified clear links between UNDP work such as technical support for national electoral commissions and the convening of political dialogue, and the operational support provided to national electoral bodies to support peaceful, inclusive and credible elections. This support has contributed to the review of election codes and related institutional frameworks, support for electoral operations, the promotion of participation, and conflict prevention in relation to elections. While the ultimate results and the free and fair nature of elections remain beyond UNDP control, all available evaluations positively noted its consistent support and flexibility as critical to enable electoral bodies to implement their mandates and for elections to move forward.

UNDP has been good at integrating an electoral cycle approach into its electoral assistance, in line with recommended best practice, covering the different electoral process through longer programmes (Guinea, Mali and Nigeria) and/or successive implementation of electoral assistance programmes (Chad), and including pre- and post-electoral activities.<sup>38</sup> While this has permitted the development of comprehensive lines of support to national electoral bodies, with activities targeting the periods before, during and after elections, the approach has faced some implementation challenges.

Almost all evaluations of electoral assistance programmes noted challenges in fully implementing the approach, due to funding and/or time constraints. The electoral cycle approach has been particularly challenging to implement in the region, where the context has been marked by a lack of internal political consensus on the electoral process (Chad and Guinea) and/or elections have been conducted in the context of sensitive political transitions (Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Mali and Nigeria). This has caused significant delays in the delivery of assistance, often meaning that pre- and/or post-election activities could be only partially implemented. Though context-dependent, this remains a significant challenge for electoral assistance strategies, as it can translate into missed opportunities to prepare for elections and/or consolidate gains from previous electoral assistance.

Time constraints are inherent to electoral processes, which are highly demanding and time-bound operations. Evaluations helped to put into perspective the urgency with which electoral assistance programmes were delivered, as well as the fluid political contexts. The evaluation of electoral assistance projects in Burkina Faso, Chad and Guinea highlighted that requests from national authorities for electoral assistance and the completion of needs assessment missions, which allow for United Nations electoral assistance programmes to be launched, were made in the same calendar year as the targeted elections.<sup>39</sup> With only several months for implementation, the intensity and time requirements focus the attention of stakeholders on electoral operations, making it difficult to keep momentum on other programme objectives such as participation, civic education and, in some cases, voter registration.

38 The Electoral Cycle Approach proposes a shift in emphasis from a focus on single event electoral support to a more comprehensive approach that includes pre- and post-electoral assistance and seeks to broaden support to a wider range of players than previously envisaged, in particular electoral bodies, political parties, media and civil society organizations. The Electoral Cycle Approach was built upon the premise that elections are comprised of a totality of interacting elements where a wide range of legal, technical and organizational aspects must be considered simultaneously. See ISPI (2021) *The Electoral Cycle Approach: Effectiveness and Sustainability of Electoral Assistance*: [https://epd.eu/wp-content/uploads/ISPI-and-ECES\\_-\\_WP\\_Sustainability\\_and\\_Effectiveness\\_of\\_Electoral\\_Assistance\\_The\\_Electoral\\_Cycle\\_Approach\\_Final.pdf](https://epd.eu/wp-content/uploads/ISPI-and-ECES_-_WP_Sustainability_and_Effectiveness_of_Electoral_Assistance_The_Electoral_Cycle_Approach_Final.pdf)

39 UNDP Burkina Faso (2016) *Final Evaluation of Projet d'Appui aux Élections au Burkina Faso 2015-2016*; UNDP Chad (2017) *PACET Final Evaluation Report*; UNDP Guinea (2019) *Final Evaluation of Projet d'Appui au Cycle Électoral en Guinée 2019*.

In some cases, political tensions and a lack of political consensus around the electoral process have constrained the effectiveness of the traditional multi-donor basket fund approach.<sup>40</sup> A similar situation was presented in the final evaluation of electoral support in the context of the 2014-2016 Nigerian electoral cycle, where there was little appetite for funding of post-electoral activities by basket fund donors.<sup>41</sup> As noted in the last Secretary General's Report on United Nations electoral assistance, the demand for electoral assistance programmes remains high, but funding challenges in recent years have affected its ability to complete assistance projects, as partner funding was granted to other non-governmental electoral assistance providers instead of through mandated United Nations mechanisms.<sup>42</sup>

Pre-electoral activities often include support for the development and review of institutional frameworks; increased voter participation and registration, including promoting the participation and representation of vulnerable groups; and peaceful engagement during elections. These are all significant contributions to support electoral processes to play their role in the democratic construction and political transition of Sahel countries. However, individually they constitute complex and long-term undertakings which cannot realistically be expected to create improvements in the short term, and significant investment is required before pre-electoral activities are launched.

**FINDING 2. UNDP plays an important role in strengthening central and local policy and planning processes, addressing critical capacity gaps at institutional level for development planning, and the integration, monitoring and reporting of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While notable contributions were made at central level, through the provision of technical expertise on governance, less support has been visible for the participation of civil society organizations in governance.**

At national level, UNDP made key contributions across the region to the development of national development plans, and monitoring and reporting (on the Millennium Development Goals, SDGs, human development and human rights). These contributions included commissioning studies and providing training and technical assistance (e.g., in public financial management or development planning).<sup>43</sup> In several countries (Chad, Cameroon, the Gambia and Mali), UNDP contributed to strengthening aid coordination by supporting the development of aid databases and reporting. While some countries require ongoing support in this area, others (such as Burkina Faso and Cameroon) have shown signs of sustainability, for example beginning to appropriate the will and capacity to maintain annual aid reporting. Finally, UNDP has made notable contributions to the development of sectoral policies related to its priority areas (such as youth, entrepreneurship, environmental protection), and to the integration of cross-cutting considerations (such as GEWE and environmental protection) into national and local development planning.

40 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad. In the case of Chad, the absence of broad political consensus over the sequencing of legislative and presidential elections caused significant delays in formalizing electoral calendars, which in turn delayed the allocation of committed funds by donors to the basket fund.

41 UNDP Nigeria (2016) Terminal Evaluation of Democratic Governance programme for Development.

42 A/74/285, Paragraph 24.

43 For example:

UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon: "UNDP has played an important role in the development of the new national development strategy 2020–2030, for example through the participatory preparation of the National Human Development Report 2019".  
UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE: "Important tools have been produced with UNDP support, notably the five sectorial policies for the Ministry in charge of governance and public service."

UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso: "UNDP plays a central role in the national strategic planning process for development, which takes into account the SDGs."

UNDP IEO (2019) ICPE the Gambia: "With the new UNSDGCF around the corner UNDP should strategically position itself in leading the SDGs given its comparative advantage."

At subnational level, UNDP has supported the development of strategic and development plans for regions and municipalities, either through support to national ministries for decentralization and local planning, or direct support to subnational entities.<sup>44</sup> Several evaluations outlined the evident contribution of UNDP to subnational government institutions in the design or revision of their regional, state, district, local or communal development plans to align with the SDGs, with a particular emphasis on climate change adaptation and the stimulation of local economies (Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria). One evaluation also noted missed opportunities in UNDP interventions to deploy planning instruments developed at national level to subnational levels, where equal need was noted due to resource constraints and the lack of well-articulated subnational development planning support strategies (Nigeria).<sup>45</sup>

In relation to decentralisation, while some interventions were initiated to strengthen local administrative capacity in a few countries, evaluations noted the limited contribution of UNDP across the Sahel region. Few evaluations highlighted positive results. For instance, in Guinea, UNDP supported the efforts of the central Government to accelerate its decentralisation process and strengthen the capacity of the subnational administration to comply with multilateral agreements and environment conventions.

Policies and plans supported by UNDP frequently faced limitations to implementation and national ownership (see Finding 3). Nonetheless, UNDP work in this area stands out for its direct and clear impact on important national planning and development processes. This influence can be attributed both to historical and technical UNDP expertise in this area, for which it is recognized by governments and donor partners alike, and to its relatively successful positioning with regards the SDGs. Many governments see UNDP as a crucial partner, not just for SDG 16 (which it leads), but for the integration of the SDGs into national planning and reporting processes, as noted for instance in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea and Mali.<sup>46</sup> These evaluations saw value in UNDP acting as an SDG coordinator, particularly from a national planning perspective.

UNDP support for strengthening national statistical systems and offices was sparse, with limited interventions noted in evaluations (Guinea, Senegal and Nigeria).<sup>47</sup> While UNDP did support knowledge and data generation, this tended to focus on commissioning one-off studies to respond to specific current planning needs. Example of global-level partnerships with the United Nations Department for Statistics, or at country level with other agencies supporting data collection (such as UNICEF for cluster surveys, World Bank on economic indicators) were rarely mentioned in the evaluations reviewed.

UNDP enjoys widespread credibility across the subregion, with several evaluations noting that stakeholders perceive it as a 'neutral' actor. In certain instances, UNDP has used its brand to convene national dialogue, for instance in relation to the organization of national elections. Beyond this, however, UNDP has made relatively limited use of its 'voice' to advocate for its objectives. Advocacy is relatively absent from evaluation reports and the programming they cover, with the partial exception of cross-cutting areas such as GEWE, where UNDP was at times more vocal (e.g. Cameroon and Niger).<sup>48</sup>

44 For instance, since 2012 UNDP has offered integrated support to Goz-Beïda, a municipality of 50,000 in Chad, by building capacity for municipal planning, budgeting, coordination and tax collection (UNDP Chad, 2017, DCPE).

45 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Nigeria.

46 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPE Mali, ICPR Cameroon; (2021) ICPE Chad; UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE.

47 UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE, UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Nigeria, (2021) ICPE Guinea.

48 UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE, UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon.

Though UNDP has worked to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the executive, it has not invested substantially in strengthening the capacity of civil society, the media and citizens to hold government to account, primarily working with non-governmental organizations as project implementing partners, rather than as a voice for rights-holders.<sup>49</sup> One evaluation reflected whether this signals that UNDP may at times be too close to, and not sufficiently demanding of, host governments, while many others barely mentioned advocacy or civil society support, suggesting that it was not a major focus.<sup>50</sup>

**FINDING 3. UNDP has broadly adopted a capacity-development mindset, but has struggled to entrench gains. To overcome the limitations of traditional training-based methods it has tested innovative approaches in certain settings, although without continued support, lasting results are rare.**

Successful capacity-development in the Sahel faces numerous challenges, such as a perennial lack of governmental resources, frequent turnover in personnel, and a training model at times driven more by *per diems* than by real need or demand. In response to these challenges, some UNDP offices have tried different capacity-development approaches extending beyond established, one-off training.

In the Gambia, UNDP transitioned from a ‘training’ to a ‘coaching and mentorship’ approach.<sup>51</sup> In a programme targeting local development officials and community members, it shifted the emphasis from classroom-based, theoretical content to ongoing and on-call practical support for the execution of activities and preparation of deliverables. In Guinea, UNDP shifted the target of its capacity-building from individuals to units or functions.<sup>52</sup> Specifically, UNDP focused its efforts to strengthen parliamentary committees on stable and permanent supporting staff and standing procedures, as opposed to parliamentarians, who have a very high turnover rate. At a more local level, in Niger UNDP designed participatory planning processes to enable municipalities and local communities to express their own needs and priorities, as opposed to using predetermined templates or national priorities.<sup>53</sup> This contributed to stronger ownership of planning processes, and ultimately, greater capacity.

While none of these examples are major innovations, they signal small departures from the dominant ‘workshop’ model, as well as from the approach to ‘building capacity’ by funding equipment and infrastructure without adequate support.<sup>54</sup> They represent moves towards more medium-term, holistic and organizational approaches to capacity-development. However, available evaluations rarely explored *why* these particular ‘innovations’ were adopted, whether initially-apparent benefits were

49 A project in Guinea was a notable exception, involving the training of 30 journalists and 120 members of civil society, and the constitution of 12 citizens’ public action monitoring units in municipalities across the country. However, no information was available on subsequent results. A similar initiative in Senegal was not implemented for lack of funds.

50 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania: “This state of affairs [UNDP proximity to government actors] may conceal an undemanding partnership that tends to respond to the administration’s requests without demanding that it fundamentally reform itself... However, the problem of political support for UNDP products has often arisen, making it necessary to question the true weight of UNDP, the quality of its advocacy, the national appropriation of its efforts and therefore its strategic positioning in the Mauritanian development landscape.”

51 UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE.

52 UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE.

53 UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE.

54 This issue was noted in UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania, (2021) Chad ICPE, UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE, UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE. The latter, for example, notes how the strategy to promote basic services relied heavily on rehabilitating infrastructure and handing them back to the management of local administrations, without first building the capacity of these to avoid the issues that led to the breakdown of the infrastructure in the first place.

truly lasting, and whether and how the approaches could be replicated elsewhere. In fact, a key success factor for capacity-development, the existence of continuous (rather than stop-and-go or one-off) support over time, was often only mentioned in passing.

Many examples of successful institution-building mentioned in evaluation reports (in the sense that the institution continued to perform its tasks effectively after UNDP support ended) involved a decade or more of steady UNDP engagement.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, though process improvements at the activity- or output-level are important, there are no shortcuts to lasting outcomes.

**FINDING 4. While UNDP successfully supports the initial and final stages of the policy cycle (design and monitoring), it has been less successful at ensuring policy adoption and implementation and, ultimately, the delivery of quality services.**

Evidence from across the region suggests that several of the plans, policies and laws developed with UNDP support subsequently remained unadopted for years. For instance, in Mauritania, the National Strategy on Social Cohesion, the Decree on Coastlines, and various legislative drafts related to access to information have been developed with UNDP support since 2010, but never subsequently adopted.<sup>56</sup> Other policies were adopted with so much delay that they had lost much of their relevance and momentum by the time they came into force (e.g. the national strategies for gender mainstreaming and support to small businesses in Mauritania). Indeed, where adopted, weaknesses in the State apparatus, particularly in terms of linkages between central and subnational administrations, often resulted in policies not being implemented. For instance, UNDP supported the development of national inclusive finance strategies in Cameroon (2013) and Chad (2017) that were adopted, but neither had been disseminated or implemented four years later. The same occurred elsewhere (e.g. Guinea).

This issue is largely driven by the challenging context, marked by limited resources and capacity, persistent political instability and a series of political, military, sanitary, environmental crises which have contributed to rapidly shifting personnel and priorities. Some of these issues are deeply rooted and historical, such as the establishment of colonial institutions geared towards resource extraction.

However, evaluations also note some issues within UNDP control. The first is a lack of political analysis with regards to the policy cycle (how to move from policy design to adoption), noted for instance in Mauritania.<sup>57</sup> The second derives from the limited focus of UNDP on strengthening basic service delivery capacity in the Sahel.<sup>58</sup> This begins at the level of UNDP strategic plans, which do not explicitly feature quality service delivery as a first-order objective. The Integrated Results and Resources Frameworks for the UNDP strategic plans for 2014-2017 and 2018-2022 specify that UNDP should focus primarily on policies and capacity that improve the enabling environment for the provision of basic services.

55 For instance, UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Cameroon: "The evaluation team noted for example that MINEPAT is capable of monitoring development through national reports, at least partly thanks to the assistance provided without interruption since 2000 by UNDP, as part of the preparation for the PRSP."

56 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania.

57 See, for instance, the second recommendation of UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania: "UNDP needs to improve its analyses, particularly of political risks and obstacles, and develop strategies to deal with these."

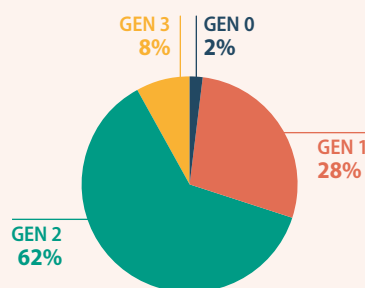
58 Based on the definition provided in the UNDP Integrated Results and Resources Framework, basic services include social services (e.g. health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, social housing, vocational training), economic services (including finance), environmental and energy services (e.g. renewables, clean fuels and technology, use of natural resources), and other services (e.g. rule of law and justice).



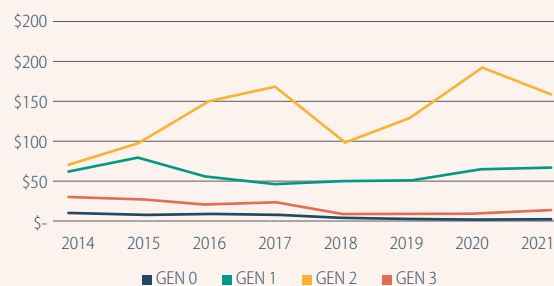
Similarly, basic service delivery appeared only inconsistently as a goal in country programmes, except for rare 'vertical' interventions in the health sector.<sup>59</sup> While the deteriorating security situation in the last decade may explain the limited ability of UNDP to intervene, this dynamic is self-reinforcing, given that gaps in local State capacity and services often create a fertile ground for conflict.

## B. Women and youth empowerment

**FIGURE 10:**  
Share of expenditure by gender marker  
Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)



**FIGURE 11:**  
Evolution of expenditure by gender marker  
Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)



Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022

Gender equity and women's empowerment is addressed across all thematic areas in UNDP programming in the Sahel, in addition to some gender-specific interventions (identified in the governance portfolio) developed over the synthesis period. Relevant expenditure, amounting to \$10 million, reflects a very small focus compared to the total programme expenditure of \$1.7 billion. However, gender marker data show that 70 percent of total programme expenditure (\$1.2 billion) was geared towards interventions that were intended to make a meaningful contribution to GEWE in the Sahel region (GEN2 and GEN3), though GEN 3 expenditure has a downward trend (from \$29.7 million to 13.5 million between 2014 and 2020), reflecting less attention to interventions with GEWE as the main goal. UNDP interventions with no or limited contributions to GEWE represented 30 percent of total programme expenditure, a significant proportion.

59 See, for example, UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon: "UNDP has provided significant support at the strategic level to strengthen capacities for inclusive development, including for preparation of the new national development strategy 2020–2030. In this respect this part of the output can be considered 'on track'. UNDP has provided some support to delivery of specific and relevant services (e.g. birth certificates) in the Far North, but otherwise contributions to improved service delivery appear to have been limited."

**FINDING 5. The integration and mainstreaming of gender equality considerations has improved over the last two UNDP strategic plan cycles, albeit from a low baseline. Overall, UNDP contributions have mainly been characterized by the inclusion of women as beneficiary targets, with limited consideration for addressing social norms and standards that inhibit women's empowerment.**

Numerous evaluations from the region noted improvements across programme cycles, measured, for example, by the share of projects with a high rating on the UNDP gender marker.<sup>60</sup> UNDP invested in internal capacity and expertise through the recruitment of gender specialists (Cameroon, Mali), the introduction of gender handbooks, goals and staff training (the Gambia), or the adoption of an office gender action plan (Cameroon, Chad).<sup>61</sup> Several offices set themselves the goal of obtaining the UNDP Gender Seal, which points to the value of having a well-defined and measurable set of standards. At the time of this synthesis, UNDP Guinea was the only Sahel country with a gold seal, a silver seal was held by the Gambia, Mauritania, Mali and Senegal, while Niger and Burkina Faso had the bronze seal. Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon are yet to obtain their awards from the Gender Seal mechanism.<sup>62</sup> While evidence in some countries suggests that participation in the corporate Gender Seal programme did not always guarantee office-wide commitment, it nevertheless helped to generate positive momentum in countries where GEWE has been challenging.<sup>63</sup>

Programmatically, UNDP supported the mainstreaming of gender considerations in local and subnational planning instruments and departments (Niger and Senegal), as well as downstream interventions focused on women, such as the Multifunctional Platforms (see Finding 13). One promising initiative was noted in the Gambia, where UNDP targeted five private sector companies to roll out the Gender Equality Seal.<sup>64</sup> Though small in scope, this is a promising addition to interventions, which have historically targeted the Government, not least given that the majority of the population is employed in the private sector or self-employed.

Evaluations, and ICPEs in particular, noted that an important share of programming reported by country offices as having a significant contribution to GEWE (GEN2) corresponded to gender-targeted, and to some extent gender-responsive, interventions.<sup>65</sup> Evaluations often raise the issue that, when gender is considered in programme design, it is often at the level of 'targeting women' as opposed to specific analysis and support strategies that aim towards transformational changes and tackling the roots of inequality (e.g., Chad, Guinea and Senegal).<sup>66</sup>

60 "An analysis of the gender markers assigned by the country office to its projects shows a positive change over the years, especially for GEN2.

61 UNDP IEO (2017) ADR Cameroon; (2020) ICPR Cameroon; (2021) ICPE Chad; UNDP Mali (2017) DCPE; UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE.

62 <https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-gender-equality-seal-initiative-undp-entities>.

63 For instance, while some countries (e.g., Burkina Faso and Chad) adopted office gender strategies, the ICPEs noted that no resources were allocated for the implementation of these strategies, which has consequently stalled.

64 UNDP the Gambia (2016) Midterm Review.

65 The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale, developed as part of the corporate evaluation of the UNDP contribution to GEWE, is a rating system that classifies gender results under five categories: (a) Gender negative = results led to negative outcomes that reinforces/aggravated gender inequalities/norms; (b) gender blind = results had no attention to gender; (c) gender-targeted = results focused on equity (50:50) of women and men in targeting; (d) gender responsive = results addressed differential needs of men and women and equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status, rights etc.; and (e) gender transformative = results contributed to changes in norms, cultural values, power structures and the roots of gender inequalities and discrimination.

66 UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE.



At the same time, the challenging context for advancing GEWE should not be underestimated, and in this context incremental (rather than radical and transformative) changes should be expected at the level of results. Another dimension reinforcing this finding across evaluations is that often women were lumped with other vulnerable groups in targeting interventions, typically youth, and differentiated strategies of support were not reflected and therefore not evident in the available evaluations.<sup>67</sup>

**FINDING 6. UNDP work to support women's economic empowerment and inclusion in governance has mostly been anchored in downstream UNDP activities. This generates positive participation and gender awareness at community level, but their *ad hoc* and short-term nature means that limited incremental change towards empowerment is generated.**

UNDP livelihood interventions targeting women have often included support for the introduction of new practices and/or productive technologies, as a means to reduce the hardship associated with household duties and livelihood activities. This has included the distribution of efficient cooking stoves, improved access to water, and the introduction of mechanical productive assets to support efficient transformation of agricultural products as seen with Multifunctional Platforms (MFPs). While improving labour conditions, they also seek to increase existing income-generating activities and/or diversify income. Overall, as presented above, the gender-targeting and to some extent -responsiveness of UNDP interventions is mostly reflected in a purposeful selection of livelihood activities that are in line with women's traditional roles in agricultural value chains.

While all reviewed evaluations included an analysis of GEWE performance, they provided little feedback on the validity of underlying assumptions around the extent to which the reduction of hardship liberated women's time for other activities that promote their empowerment. In general, positive outcomes were found in improving women's access to income-generating activities and living conditions. For instance: activities that included access to efficient cooking stoves, water and renewable energies were associated with healthier environments; agricultural transformation activities were associated with improved and diversified livelihood income; and interventions involving farming plots for women-headed households with improved food security. However, project strategies have tended to focus on the primary objectives of delivering livelihood solutions, and did not often include follow-up interventions and support for the special needs of the targeted groups of women.

The implementation of MFPs illustrates this logic in different forms, as a dedicated project and/or integrated into other projects, in the context of protected areas and ecosystem adaptation. Evaluations of national programmes (Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania) confirmed that, while MFP interventions have succeeded in incremental improvement in women's living conditions, this doesn't always lead to expected empowerment outcomes, reflecting the additional vulnerabilities of women beneficiaries. Some unintended consequences were perceptible, such as cases where a significant number of women beneficiaries voluntarily handed the management of MFPs to men due to the limited time available for household chores. One evaluation noted that, despite targeting traditionally women-led activities for income-generating activities, their

67 UNDP IEO (2021) Evaluation of UNDP support to Youth Economic Empowerment.

success attracted men who eventually took over the activities.<sup>68</sup> For example, in Guinea, improved access to biodigesters through biogas initiatives *did* generate the expected benefits for women, who saw their burden and hardship in collecting wood reduced. However, field missions conducted a year after the close of the project showed that in some cases this labour was transferred to the collection of feedstock, a point that was missing in the implementation strategy for this project.<sup>69</sup>

UNDP also played a role in promoting women's participation in governance. Evaluations outlined a range of interventions: supporting political parties to strengthen internal processes to advance the role of women candidates for public office; training women on public mobilization and electoral campaigning; supporting women in office to become role models and drivers for change (Nigeria);<sup>70</sup> sensitization on the participation of women as voters and candidates (the Gambia);<sup>71</sup> and creating platforms to promote dialogue and encourage women's political participation (Cameroon).<sup>72</sup> This support yielded limited results, however, in relation to transformative changes in women's political participation. In the Gambia, a gender-sensitive electoral legal and regulatory framework to address gender barriers did not materialize, despite support for its enactment and adoption.<sup>73</sup>

The UNDP contribution to women's participation in the Sahel was limited to promoting gender awareness and, despite progress in policy adoption, transformative changes (including greater representation of women in the political arena with more affirmative action to tackle the root causes of gender inequality) are yet to be achieved.<sup>74</sup> At community level, especially in conflict-affected areas, UNDP-supported governance and peacebuilding initiatives targeted women with a view to strengthening their participation in conflict resolution and peace mechanisms. This was positively noted in evaluations of Burkina Faso, Chad and Guinea, where women community leaders were involved in the peaceful management of local conflicts.<sup>75</sup>

**FINDING 7. Projects focused on youth successfully reached their target populations, but were usually short-term and lacked differentiation to respond to the specific needs of youth, and contribute to broader social cohesion and conflict-prevention objectives.**

UNDP has not operated with a clear vision, definition or strategy for youth-oriented programming and engagement for most of the past decade. Whilst most of its programming in the Sahel engages youth by default, given that most of the region's population is under 25, only a subset of projects has explicitly targeted youth groups, mainly in the areas of employment and, increasingly, conflict prevention.

68 UNDP (2015) Terminal evaluation of the Regional Project on sustainable management of endemic ruminant livestock in West Africa (PROGEBE). Implemented in the Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Senegal, the evaluation observes that while pastoralist women have the traditional right to market milk not needed for the household and thus have a say on the revenues for, the support provided in enhancing dairy milk production capacities for women and their success attracted the interest of men and excluded women.

69 UNDP Guinea (2021) Final Evaluation of Projet de Création d'un marché pour le développement et l'utilisation des ressources de biogaz en Guinée.

70 UNDP Nigeria (2016) DGD II Terminal Evaluation Report.

71 UNDP the Gambia (2019) Electoral support to the Gambia (2016-2018) project, Final Evaluation.

72 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon.

73 UNDP the Gambia (2019) Electoral support to the Gambia (2016-2018) project, Final Evaluation.

74 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, ICPE Guinea.

75 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso.

The UNDP Sahel Offer, released in mid-2021, explicitly names youth as one of its three key offers and areas of work, noting the demographic importance of African youth (65 percent of the population are under 25), their exclusion from economic and political opportunities, and their exposure to recruitment by non-state armed groups. Prior to that, however, the strategic and programmatic focus on youth has been uneven.<sup>76</sup>

Central to this has been the lack of a core or central definition. As the recent UNDP IEO Evaluation of UNDP Support for Youth Economic Empowerment notes: “There is no consensus on the definition of youth.” UNDP officially relies on the United Nations definition (ages 15-24), whereas the latest Sahel Offer repeats the figure of 65 percent under 25 (which includes infants and children, despite UNDP having limited engagement at that level) and, in practice, programming often extends to include individuals up to the ages of 30 or 35. Whilst this definitional flexibility is certainly appropriate in a region where there is no clear cut-off point (such as completion of education, entry into the labour market, recruitment into armed groups, or marriage), UNDP programming does not explicitly distinguish between the needs of children, adolescents, and young (or not-so-young) adults (e.g. in terms of protection, education, employment), or other differentiating factors such as gender or geography.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, ‘youth’ is often used as a catch-all term and not approached in a strategic way, as noted for instance in the 2020 ICPE for Mali: “Work with and for young people, as well as the promotion of volunteering, for example, are principles found in UNDP activities in Mali, but in a diffuse way and without strategic inclusion of the question of youth in the programme.”<sup>78</sup>

UNDP initiatives for youth economic empowerment in the region have tended to focus on providing training, seed equipment or funding, and occasionally placements or internships. Some, such as UNDP support to the Lagos State Employability Support Programme (2017-2022) in Nigeria, have supported existing government programmes, or promoted the expansion of public services, such as the establishment of municipal employment offices and services in Cameroon. Evaluations suggest that stakeholders appreciate the training, equipment and infrastructure, but that interventions have often been too short-term to entrench results.<sup>79</sup> Evaluations also note that most trained youth remain unemployed subsequent to the receipt of support, and that outcomes are in general difficult to measure

76 Globally and regionally, UNDP focus on youth has fluctuated and lacked a common thread. Globally, over the three last UNDP strategic plans, youth was mentioned frequently in the 2014-2017 plan, then barely in the 2018-2021 plan (one mention in passing), and only lightly in the 2022-2025 plan. At the regional level, a reverse but equally uneven trend is observed, as UNISS 2013 makes no mention whatsoever of youth, whereas UNSPS 2017 calls it out in its priority #6 “Empowering women and youth for peace and development in the Sahel”, an emphasis further accentuated in the latest Sahel Offer.

77 This reflects an observation made in the recent global evaluation of UNDP support for Youth Economic Empowerment: “A review of project documents indicated that most interventions did not specify the type of youth groups and almost all did not specify which women/young women they were targeting”.

78 Some other development agencies have more explicitly defined what they mean by youth, albeit with some variation. The African Development Bank defines youth as 15-to-35 year-olds (based on the International Conference of Labour Statisticians), and the UNICEF Adolescent and Youth Engagement Strategic Framework defines adolescents as 10-19, youth as 15-24 and young people as encompassing both adolescents and youth (i.e., 10-24).

79 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, (2020) ICPR Cameroon, ICPE Burkina Faso, (2021) ICPE Nigeria, UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE, UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE. For instance, the 2021 ICPE Nigeria states: “Evidence from interviews with local partners confirmed that the short duration of the training programmes did not allow for more time for trainees to master the various skills.” UNDP Burkina Faso (2020) Évaluation Finale du Projet “Femmes-Jeunes Entrepreneurs et Citoyenneté”: “Indeed, the equipment and training delivered for the incubators as part of the project will be used for the coaching of several entrepreneurs for the coming years... However, to ensure sustainability of these actions, additional support is necessary both for the incubators and for the entrepreneurs they support.”

since no tracer studies are conducted after project completion.<sup>80</sup> The issue of short-term support also extends to institutional strengthening initiatives. In cases where UNDP set up or strengthened vocational training or youth employment centres, their sustainability is rarely assured following the end of the project. For instance, the 2021 Nigeria ICPE notes that “some outputs stopped functioning as soon as the project ended due to non-payment of the necessary expenses for the continuation of services by the concerned ministry.”

Furthermore, youth economic empowerment programming in the Sahel has tended to focus on skills development, i.e. the supply side of the unemployment issue, much more than on the availability of jobs in the economy (demand side) or the enabling environment as regards policy and quality public services.<sup>81</sup> Whilst some examples of partnership with the private sector exist (such as the Nigeria Jubilee Fellows programme or Cameroon Youth Entrepreneurship Innovation Challenge), these are still nascent. In many projects, youth are not supported with finding placements or jobs following their training.

UNDP downstream ambitions in terms of supporting youth employment face funding constraints. In Nigeria, for instance, the UNDP inclusive growth portfolio disbursed only \$12 million over the 2018-2021 period, in a country with millions of under- or unemployed youth. The 2021 Nigeria ICPE suggests that the UNDP added value lies not in tackling the problem head-on, but rather in supporting the Government to adopt effective, scalable programmes.

With regards to peace and security, youth was extensively, and at times explicitly, targeted in projects aimed at strengthening social cohesion and stabilization, including some transboundary projects (e.g. Cameroon and Chad; Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali). These projects have tended to pursue multi-pronged and integrated approaches, involving livelihoods interventions on the one hand (ranging from very short-term ‘cash for work’ to more medium-term skills development interventions), and sociocultural activities to foster cohesion, understanding and reintegration on the other. Outputs have included: local committees (for peace, early warning, etc.); plans and commitments for improved local governance; cultural and sports events, popular with youth; awareness campaigns conducted over local radio; and training and sensitization events for youth, women, officials and armed forces. The participation of youth in events and committees was found to be high, but otherwise projects suffered from similar issues as other inclusive growth projects, such as short project duration, lack of focus on demand or linkages with the private sector, and general implementation issues (e.g. start-up, procurement and disbursement delays), etc.<sup>82</sup>

80 For instance, UNDP Mali (2020) Évaluation Finale Projet Sécurité Humaine Nord: “The evaluation was unfortunately not able to measure the impact of the project in terms of decent job created or self-employment due to the absence of a database that the project should have developed and updated regularly.”

81 UNDP IEO (2022) Evaluation of UNDP support for Youth Economic Empowerment. This mirrors findings in the recent global evaluation of UNDP support for youth economic empowerment, which found that 45 percent of youth economic empowerment projects are focused on supply (skills development), 35 percent on demand (fostering existence and accessibility of jobs), 15 percent on the policy environment, and only 5 percent on a hybrid approach.

82 For instance, UNDP (2019) Final Project Evaluation for Soutenir les mécanismes de consolidation de la paix au niveau communautaire et l’inclusion des jeunes dans les zones situées à la frontière entre le Tchad et le Cameroun: “Youths, even though their numbers remained relatively limited in the localities targeted in Chad and Cameroon, showed enthusiasm in the conduct of diverse community level activities including the promotion of peace and conflict management. Apart from this, youth have volunteered and conducted several initiatives such as awareness raising, sensitization, and counselling at their own initiatives .”

In some cases, the limited outcomes and follow-up of projects created frustration. For instance, the 2021 Nigeria ICPE noted that failure to deliver starter packs to graduates of UNDP-supported training programmes generated disappointment for youth from 'hot-spot areas', and other evaluations reported similarly mixed satisfaction of beneficiaries.<sup>83</sup> In some cases, limited funding meant that not all beneficiaries were able to benefit from the package of activities deployed by a project, itself creating frustrations and tensions amongst beneficiary groups.<sup>84</sup>

Whilst cash-for-work and seed grants did contribute to immediate stabilization, and events fostered discourse between communities, medium-term contributions to employment and social cohesion outcomes have been limited, and there are few prospects for scaling and replication, given that upstream linkages are often limited. For instance, with respect to the *Projet Femmes-Jeunes Entrepreneurs et Citoyenneté*, the 2020 ICPE for Burkina Faso concludes that the "involvement of state structures promoting entrepreneurship has not been sufficient" for the project, which is not part of a national strategy, and that "serious concerns around its success and sustainability" therefore exist.

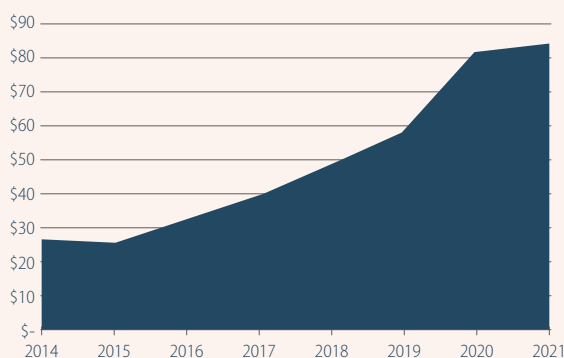
## 2.2 UNISS Strategic Goal 2: National and regional security mechanisms are capable of addressing cross-border threats

UNDP places the promotion of peaceful, stable societies at the core of its mandate, and leads SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. However, the framing of this mandate has evolved over time. Under the 2014-2017 UNDP Strategic Plan, peacebuilding, preparedness and crisis-response work were all captured under the 'resilience' pillar. Under the subsequent Strategic Plan (2018-2021), the same 'resilience' pillar focused more on preparedness, as peacebuilding moved under the governance pillar, a trend continued in the current Strategic Plan (2022-2025). Similarly, whereas UNSPS 2018 made peacebuilding a pillar on its own, UNISS 2013 and the new UNDP Sahel Offer 2021 frame this work under the governance pillar. In summary, notions of resilience, governance, peacebuilding, stabilization, disaster risk reduction and crisis response have evolved and overlapped over time.

83 For instance, (ibid) : " Youth have judged that the training that they benefitted from was found incomplete for some and satisfying for others. Those consulted during focus group would have liked to participate through all the phases of the process of economic reinsertion and participate beyond sensitization or the first phase of community activities (cash for work)"

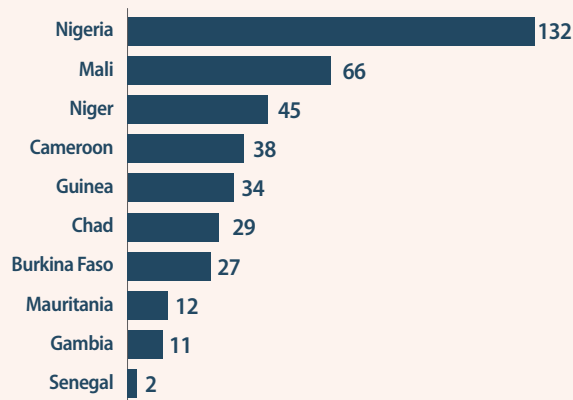
84 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, (2022) ICPE Guinea.

**FIGURE 12:**  
Trend of expenditure for peacebuilding  
and conflict prevention Sahel region  
2014-21 (US\$ million)



Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022

**FIGURE 13:**  
Programme expenditure for peacebuilding  
and conflict prevention Sahel region 2014-21  
(US\$ million)



Peacebuilding and conflict prevention programming has been the largest area of UNDP work in the Sahel and covered several topics, including stabilisation, recovery and resilience, and peace and security. Total expenditure amounted to \$395 million between 2014 and 2021, representing 23 percent of the UNDP programme expenditure in the region for the period.

Countries affected by ethnic and religious conflict and violent extremism and those in fragile settings are the largest beneficiaries of UNDP peacebuilding and conflict prevention programming in the Sahel. Nigeria is first with 33 percent of the programme expenditure, followed by Mali (17 percent), Niger (11 percent) and Cameroon (10 percent). Countries in non-conflict settings, such as Senegal, Mauritania and the Gambia, have few interventions addressing peacebuilding and conflict prevention. However, while Burkina Faso has faced multiple conflicts and remains one of the Sahel countries most vulnerable to conflict, the UNDP peacebuilding programme was relatively small (7 percent) compared with Mali and Niger.

**FINDING 8. Sustainable stabilization and peacebuilding require integrated approaches that extend beyond fostering dialogue and support meaningful and sustainable livelihood opportunities to tackle the root causes of violence and prevent conflict over scarce resources.**

UNDP has supported a host of stabilization and social cohesion projects in fragile areas of the Sahel, particularly Northern Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Mali and central and Northern Nigeria. Programming ranges from preventative measures such as community security, early warning and the prevention of violent extremism, to restorative measures such as the rehabilitation of basic services and administrative structures, deradicalization, reconciliation and reintegration.

For instance, to prevent violence and extremism in northern Cameroon, UNDP: supported the establishment of 11 community mediation platforms, which in 2019 managed 20 conflicts and facilitated the reinsertion of 300 former Boko Haram associates; trained youth to become ‘actors for prevention’ and community leaders to engage with youth at risk; and supported the establishment of community ‘early warning systems’ involving civil society actors.<sup>85</sup> In Cameroon and Chad, a similar project used sports and theatre to mobilize youth and build bridges between ethnicities, generations and sexes.<sup>86</sup> Targeted communities and authorities expressed great appreciation for these mechanisms, noting that they supported an increased sense of trust and security, which had been eroded during the conflict.<sup>87</sup>

It is difficult and often too early at the moment of evaluation to capture whether such projects have contributed to lasting increased social cohesion, though some evaluations concluded that this was not yet visibly the case. Several evaluations noted that dialogue and committees alone, without support for livelihood-generation activities, were unlikely to foster lasting peace, as they focus predominantly on information and awareness rather than the root causes of conflict, such as competition for scarce resources.<sup>88</sup> Support for livelihoods, whether in the form of cash-for-work, cash grants, training, starter kits or otherwise, were often amongst the most appreciated aspects of projects, and several evaluations stressed the importance of introducing or scaling these components within social cohesion projects.<sup>89</sup>

Much of the UNDP peacebuilding and conflict prevention work takes the form of downstream support for income-generating activities. Evaluations in several countries, including Cameroon and Niger, commended the focus of UNDP social cohesion programming on supporting income-generation opportunities (e.g., farming, fishing, animal husbandry, soap making, etc.). Project theories of change in these countries explicitly noted economic inclusion as the first step to alleviating social tensions.<sup>90</sup> In some cases, these livelihoods projects generated local benefits, with evaluations noting increased revenue, stronger local economies, and even increased social cohesion (e.g. Chad, Cameroon, Mali and Niger).<sup>91</sup> However, as with similar projects in other areas (such as inclusive growth or environment), the success of livelihoods interventions hinges on contextual adaptation and appropriate support for business development, entrepreneurship and value-chain development, much beyond the simple provision of training and starter kits seen in some cases (e.g. Cameroon, Nigeria).

85 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon.

86 UNDP (2019) Final project evaluation for Soutenir les mécanismes de consolidation de la paix au niveau communautaire et l’inclusion des jeunes dans les zones situées à la frontière entre le Tchad et le Cameroun.

87 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Nigeria, ICPE Chad.

88 UNDP Chad (2018) Final project evaluation d’appui à la lutte contre la radicalisation au sein des populations tchadiennes) “With regard to proximate causes [of radicalization], the project has attempted a response by promoting information and awareness. As for root causes, a local development process providing vulnerable populations with a livelihood perspective could, in the medium-term, slow radicalization.” See also UNDP IEO (2020) Cameroon ICPR.

89 See, for example, UNDP Chad (2018) Final project evaluation d’appui à la lutte contre la radicalisation au sein des populations tchadiennes), and UNDP (2021) Final Evaluation of the Integrated Regional Stabilization of the Lake Chad Basin Phase I and Phase II, 2017-2020.

90 UNDP (2019) Final project evaluation Finances Par Les Fonds Supplémentaires Du Japon En 2018 Au Cameroun : “Economic reintegration plays the role of a central engine in peacebuilding in the sense that if it succeeds, the other aspects of reintegration (social, geographical) will be all the easier. Indeed, in the absence of economic prospects, there is little hope and it is therefore difficult for young targets to resist the only alternative which would be illicit activities.”

91 See, for instance, UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE: “The evaluation team believes that the achievements are significant. Indeed, an analysis of the products resulting from UNDP interventions (with the support of other partners) shows that the national and local institutions supported and the targeted communities are able to ensure the security of goods and persons.”



In this regard, projects struggled in design or delivery. For instance, two evaluations (Niger and Mali) found that training was too short to successfully build capacity.<sup>92</sup> While the training sessions were positively appreciated by beneficiaries, both the trainees and the implementing partners noted the small number of training days and the relatively large number of participants during certain sessions, with an impact on the quality of learning. In some cases, the inability of projects to offer a comprehensive set of interventions to all targeted beneficiaries was noted as a source of discontent. More generally, several country-level evaluations noted disappointing results in this area overall, as projects failed to increase communities' incomes (Mauritania) or reduce local tensions (Mali), or were too fragmented, short or superficial to support sustainable livelihood outcomes, on which social cohesion objectives largely depend (Chad, Cameroon).<sup>93</sup>

**FINDING 9. Fostering downstream and upstream collaborations – locally with influential actors, horizontally with other agencies, and nationally with key institutions – is an important success factor for peacebuilding projects.**

Several UNDP projects fostered alliances at different levels to secure political buy-in and/or support for project implementation. These included local alliances, such as close engagement with local administrations (Mali) and traditional chiefs (Niger);<sup>94</sup> partnerships with locally-anchored civil society organizations tasked to deliver programming where the State is absent or weak (known as the 'faire-faire' approach (Burkina Faso and Mali); with parents' associations from Koranic schools to fight radicalization, or artisan associations to train former combatants (Chad).<sup>95</sup> Several evaluations accordingly note the importance of translating trainings, tools and materials into local languages to fully engage communities.<sup>96</sup> A second level was UNDP collaboration with other United Nations entities with support from PBF or UNICEF,<sup>97</sup> and in some instances leading regional projects such as an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) project on disarmament.<sup>98</sup>

Finally, the most successful interventions linked local to national, to ensure that downstream interventions were led, or at least monitored, by national organizations. In Mali, UNDP support for the Ministry of National Reconciliation, and the involvement of the National Professional Training Directorate, enabled the State to lead on local interventions.<sup>99</sup> In Burkina Faso, UNDP built the capacity of the National Observatory for Religious Affairs to establish networks and conduct training across the

92 UNDP Niger (2019) Final project evaluation jeunes, paix et développement dans la région de Tahoua au Niger (JPAD): "In light of the targeted issues and challenges, the evaluation found that the duration of these trainings was far too short and the number of beneficiaries too small to have the desired impact on behavior change."

93 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania; (2020) ICPE Mali, (2021) ICPE Chad, (2017) ADR Cameroon.

94 UNDP (2020) Final Project Evaluation D'appui à la Sécurité Humaine au Nord Mali à travers le Renforcement de la Résilience des Jeunes et des Femmes, 2015-2019.

95 UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, (2021) ICPE Chad.

96 UNDP Mali (2018) Final Evaluation of phase II of IPE project; and UNDP Chad (2018) Final Project Evaluation d'appui à la lutte contre la radicalisation au sein des populations tchadiennes.

97 As noted in UNDP the Gambia (2017) DCPE, and in Chad and Cameroon with UNICEF in the UNDP IEO (2021) Chad ICPE.

98 UNDP (2018) Final Report of the Midterm Evaluation of The ECOWAS-EU Small Arms Project. In other cases, however, UNDP failed to leverage synergies from collaboration. UNDP Chad (2018) Final Project Evaluation d'appui à la lutte contre la radicalisation au sein des populations tchadiennes, reports that several United Nations agencies worked on social cohesion in silo, without harmonizing processes or objectives.

99 UNDP Mali (2020) Final Project Evaluation D'appui à la Sécurité Humaine au Nord Mali à travers le Renforcement de la Résilience des Jeunes et des Femmes, 2015-2019.



country,<sup>100</sup> and similar efforts were witnessed in Niger.<sup>101</sup> Such ‘hands-on’ support, linking upstream capacity with downstream interventions, was more effective than pure upstream work such as the development of strategies and policies, which were often not subsequently adopted (e.g. the Mauritania social cohesion strategy), or implemented (e.g., the Chad anti-terrorism strategy).

The UNDP regional stabilization initiative for the Lake Chad Basin exemplifies a highly integrated, multi-level, consultative approach to peacebuilding in the face of a protracted transnational crisis. Between 2017 and 2020, UNDP led the Integrated Regional Stabilization Initiative for the Lake Chad Basin through its country offices in Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad. This four-year, \$13.5 million initiative aimed at short-term stabilization, increased community security and social cohesion, and long-term reintegration and economic opportunities for former Boko Haram affiliates and affected communities. In the first phase, the initiative supported extensive consultations with national authorities, including nine governors from affected regions across the four countries, which were gradually extended to involve civil society. These consultations generated substantial buy-in for the initiative and led to the adoption of a common strategy and reintegration approach, while allowing the adaptation of programming to each context by identifying stakeholders, needs and opportunities specific to each setting.

In the second phase, UNDP and selected partners continued to advocate for a harmonized and human-rights based approach to the reintegration of former soldiers, while rolling out a host of interventions to generate awareness through radio messages, rebuild key infrastructure such as police stations and skills training centres, provide training to officials on participatory local planning and budgeting, offer livelihood opportunities equally to reintegrated fighters and affected communities, and support various mechanisms for dialogue within and across communities.

While the general humanitarian situation continues to worsen, the integrated, consultative, transnational nature of the initiative has driven important gains, such as the first ever elements of convergence towards a common reintegration approach (not yet fully achieved given differences in legislative frameworks). This is exemplified by the reversal in Cameroon’s ‘death penalty’ policy for former Boko Haram fighters. The programme also stands out for its extensive engagement with civil society, through partnerships with community radio stations for messaging that reached 300.000 people, or with associations like the *Union des artisans du Lac* in Chad, to engage local actors, and train and reintegrate former Boko Haram fighters.

Through this extensive engagement, bonds and trust broken by conflict, including with the State, have begun to be re-established (if still very fragile). Following these two initial phases, the programme has transformed into a Regional Stabilization Facility, funded by a host of international donor partners. Overall, and despite some limitations, this exemplifies how UNDP can successfully leverage its regional position, historical expertise with reintegration and peacebuilding, proximity to host governments, and coordination role within the United Nations system to drive an integrated set of upstream and downstream interventions that consider policy issues, national and local administrations, United Nations system collaboration, cross-border issues, civil society participation, local governance, community dialogue, livelihoods, former fighters, affected communities, internally-displaced people, and even their collective psychosocial trauma.

100 However, the Burkina Faso ICPE noted that the Observatory’s ability to deliver activities had diminished since the end of UNDP support, pointing to sustainability risks even when upstream-downstream links exist.

101 UNDP Niger (2015) Final Project Evaluation jeunes, paix et développement dans la région de Tahoua au Niger.

**FINDING 10. UNDP-supported rule of law work in the Sahel was not well balanced between downstream and upstream levels. While noticeable contributions were made in downstream interventions to promote community security and access to justice, upstream work to strengthen judicial systems has been limited.**

Several evaluations commended UNDP for strengthening access to justice for citizens, notably in rural areas, for instance by partnering with the National Bar Association of Chad to introduce legal services to a region where they were previously absent, supporting the Bar Association of the Gambia mobile legal clinics, and sending United Nations volunteers to support due process in courts in Niger.<sup>102</sup> However, these downstream interventions reached relatively few citizens, and are not necessarily scalable or sustainable. There were relatively few examples of interventions targeted at structural strengthening of the judicial system as an independent branch of government, or of anti-corruption programming. This may be due in part to the relative underfunding of rule of law work during the review period: of \$64 million budgeted, only \$37 million was spent, a 58 percent execution rate, significantly lower than the average across all programme areas (77 percent).<sup>103</sup>

During the review period, UNDP worked to improve the relationship between security forces (police and armed forces) and citizens in at least three countries (Burkina Faso, Chad and Guinea). Whereas interventions in Chad consisted largely of local dialogue to strengthen trust and collaboration between civilians and security forces, projects in Burkina Faso and Guinea aimed at structural reform, involving new legal instruments and urban security interventions in both countries.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, in Guinea, UNDP supported the development of local security plans, human rights training for security personnel, forced retirement for elderly security personnel, capacity-building of civil society organizations and the judiciary for the monitoring of abuses, a small weapons recuperation programme, and the reopening of the national policy academy. In both countries, evaluations concluded that the work was relevant, and contributed to putting “security sector reform on the right track”, while also noting that “the achievements of UNDP support remain fragile”.<sup>105</sup>

**FINDING 11. Overall, UNDP is an important, credible actor in the areas of peacebuilding and stabilization, but suffers from certain capacity deficits in crisis- and conflict-responsive programming, and related monitoring and evaluation (M&E).**

Peacebuilding is a natural fit for UNDP, given its long history of global and regional involvement in conflict prevention (e.g. disarmament interventions), its ability to work across sectors (poverty, inclusion, climate change, conflict) and convene actors (across government, political parties, civil society, religious leaders, and other agencies and donors), and its expected leadership on the human-peace-development nexus.

102 UNDP Chad (2015) DCPE; UNDP the Gambia (2014) DCPE; UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE.

103 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad: “Building on past engagement, UNDP was able to continue extending support in the area of elections and rule of law. However, all support was implemented on UNDP core resources which were not sufficient and limited the scope of implementation. These trends in expenditure and programme development suggest a less favourable environment for resource mobilization.... Nevertheless, the review and interviews note that UNDP has been among the most active agencies in the area of governance and consolidation of rule of law, highlighting both the important role of UNDP and the challenging funding environment.”

104 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE.

105 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso.

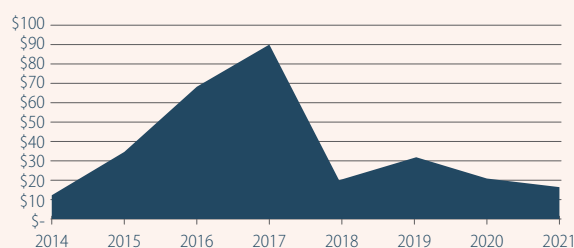
However, several evaluations (e.g. Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Chad) called on UNDP to strengthen its capacity in this area.<sup>106</sup> In fact, of all areas which country programme evaluations recommended strengthening, conflict-sensitive programming capacity was the most frequently mentioned. Specifically, evaluations stressed the need to: strengthen knowledge management in crisis response within and across country offices; increase the sensitivity of country programme documents to evolving security situations; and improve the ability of UNDP to respond to complex, multidimensional, protracted crises.

Ultimately, this should also translate into improved M&E, as several evaluations (e.g. Cameroon, Chad, Mali and Nigeria) noted weaknesses in this area (overambitious goals, unclear indicators, poor monitoring of outputs and outcomes) that prevented evaluators from assessing the effectiveness of peacebuilding and social cohesion interventions. Some ICPEs also raised missed opportunities for UNDP to leverage its field position and programming for data and knowledge generation, with a view to support its in-country thought leadership and advocacy, and support collective learning.<sup>107</sup>

## 2.3 UNISS Strategic Goal 3: Humanitarian development plans and interventions are integrated to build long-term resilience

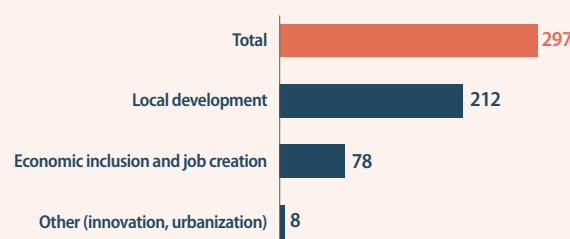
### A. Inclusive growth

**FIGURE 14:**  
Expenditure trend for inclusive growth Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)



Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022

**FIGURE 15:**  
Programme expenditure for inclusive growth Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)



106 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPR Cameroon; (2021) ICPE Chad.

107 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, ICPE Nigeria, ICPE Guinea.

Inclusive growth encompasses UNDP efforts to eradicate poverty through the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities. While not fully explicit in the UNDP 2014-2017 Strategic Plan (where 'livelihoods' appeared under the environmental pillar), the subsequent Strategic Plan (2018-2021) had a poverty reduction pillar (Eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions). This approach has continued in the current (2022-2025) Strategic Plan, which features poverty and inequality as its #1 Signature Solution. Regionally, inclusive growth did not feature explicitly in UNISS (where poverty-reduction fell under 'increasing resilience'), but was the first pillar in UNSPS 2017 ("Promoting inclusive and equitable growth and increasing access to basic services"). Most recently, in the new UNDP Sahel Offer, it has been subsumed under the 'youth' pillar, which touches on livelihoods and inclusive growth.

The two main areas of work during the period under review were local development, with almost three quarters of the expenditure for this stream, and economic inclusion and job creation, with most of the remainder. Overall, UNDP spent \$297 million on this thematic area, roughly 17 percent of its total programming expenditure in the region between 2014 and 2021. The inclusive growth portfolio in the Sahel is driven by Senegal, which accounted for 62 percent of the portfolio expenditure over 2014-2021, specifically through the Emergency Community Development Programme (58 percent). Excluding that project, overall expenditure in this thematic area appears much lower, and lags far behind expenditure in other areas such as governance, environment or peacebuilding. The rest of the portfolio is scattered across the remaining nine countries, with Burkina Faso and Chad the second largest (6 percent) and Mauritania and the Gambia the smallest (1 percent).

**FINDING 12. UNDP-supported rural development initiatives in the Sahel touched on infrastructure building and rehabilitation for local economic stimulation, agricultural value chains and livelihood support. Though long-term effects on the local economy cannot be ascertained, evidence shows that integrated and participatory rural development has positive outcomes for beneficiary communities.**

Throughout the region and period under review, UNDP invested in downstream local development projects designed to improve rural infrastructure and livelihoods. Though details of design and delivery vary, the UNDP approach stood out for its holistic nature, integrating considerations from different sectors and thematic areas, and frequently taking the local community as the starting point. For instance, the 'Ecovillages' initiative in Senegal targeted 84 villages and 40,000 people for interventions which simultaneously aimed to provide energy, safeguard the environment, and provide livelihood opportunities and income-generating activities.<sup>108</sup> In Cameroon, rural development efforts centred on the establishment of one-stop shops, combining municipal and governmental services with the provision of employment and entrepreneurship training by non-governmental and private organizations.<sup>109</sup>

108 UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE.

109 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Cameroon.

While there is not sufficient evidence to rigorously trace the long-term impacts of these interventions, evaluations provided predominantly positive assessments of their initial benefits. Community involvement was a key success factor, from the planning stage to implementation. Two evaluations (Burkina Faso and Niger) noted the successful capacity-building of municipalities to manage their own construction and infrastructure projects (as opposed management by central government or UNDP).<sup>110</sup>

Available evidence points to improved results when stakeholders, including final beneficiaries, were involved in the identification of livelihoods and income-generating activities promoted to community groups and individuals. In this regard, several project evaluations highlighted the value of participation in planning, design and implementation phases, to ensure that the livelihoods solutions proposed to beneficiaries and the selection of productive assets are adequate and viable in relation to the capacity of community groups to collectively manage, maintain and grow them. Signs of improved uptake and viability of income-generating activities and greater ownership were reported. While arguably more challenging to implement, the same observations were made for community-level activities in the context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention programming. Here, interventions that combined a top-down and bottom-up approach to stakeholder participation, for instance to determine priority infrastructure for cash-for-work activities or the nature of income-generating activities, often obtained better performance in terms of sustainability, immediate relevance and effectiveness. They also contributed to empowering vulnerable groups and strengthening community relations.

The importance of an integrated and participatory approach can also be seen through the outcomes of projects that did not adequately consult intended beneficiaries at the design stage. Several evaluations covering MFPs showed how this has translated to a lack of ownership and/or the immediate viability of income-generating activities. In the context of MFPs, the multiple challenges faced in implementation have often raised questions over the quality of feasibility studies, noting in one case the uniformity of results presented in different localities. In Guinea, post-Ebola local development work focused on rapidly improving water and sanitation infrastructure in as many municipalities as possible. However, the standardized, top-down nature of the programme resulted in the rehabilitation of many facilities which had previously failed due to a lack of local maintenance, without additional support to strengthen local ownership and management. Consequently, the new facilities carried the same risk of falling into disrepair.<sup>111</sup> Similar issues with top-down projects were noted in Burkina Faso and Chad.<sup>112</sup>

110 UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE: "... the direct partnership with local communities through the strengthening of communal project management, local development and the direct signing of letters of agreement (LOA) with municipalities has proven to be very productive."

UNDP Burkina Faso (2014) DCPE: "The ACRIC project has contributed to the development of the concept of local project management in 17 municipalities in the Boucle du Mouhoun region... agents to support local project management have been assigned to some rural municipalities to provide them with the necessary support and advice. This expertise has been well appreciated and mayors now see the importance of this type of agents. The Permanent Fund for the Development of Territorial Communities recognizes that the financing allocated to municipalities is executed more quickly and with better quality when local authorities are in charge of the project."

111 UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE: "At the operational level, capacity development is rather diluted... The civil society implementing partners who relay the program in the field often seem to favor a technical approach instead of a holistic approach more concerned with the transfer of skills. This situation is illustrated by the community investments that represent 50 percent of the post-Ebola recovery fund at the grassroots level. A large part of these resources is used in the rehabilitation of community hydraulic works that are then handed over to the communal services whose management had previously left them at a standstill, without capacity building."

112 UNDP IEO (2020) Burkina Faso ICPE: "Interventions for the protection of riverbanks have not succeeded in bringing about real changes due to the adoption of an approach not truly adapted to the socio-cultural context." Chad DCPE 2017: "some beneficiaries and implementing partners met in the field mentioned that in most cases projects were designed without consultation and were only presented to them at the time of implementation."

During the review period, UNDP worked to strengthen inclusive growth by supporting agricultural value-chain development (such as rice, mango, rubber or non-timber forest products) in a few countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, the Gambia and Mali.<sup>113</sup> In general, these evaluations tended to conclude that such interventions were not major a success: despite providing benefits to a few direct beneficiaries, the envisaged value chains were rarely viable or sustainable. Challenges included the reliability of production (lack of capacity and resources), issues with marketing (lack of access to buyers, complex logistics), and unrealistic expectations. After two subsequent evaluations found disappointing results, a report in Cameroon went on to suggest that “UNDP may reconsider its ongoing investment in agricultural value chains, which was identified as an area of weakness in the previous independent country programme evaluation and for which results again are limited under the present programme”.<sup>114</sup>

**FINDING 13. The effectiveness and sustainability of multifunctional platforms depends on a set of supportive and follow-up measures beyond the roll-out of the platforms, to create a conducive context for achieving their intended results in terms of rural transformation and the empowerment of vulnerable groups.**

MFPs have been implemented since the late 1990s, and UNDP continued to integrate this approach in its interventions throughout the review period, as evidenced in evaluations of almost all ten countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal). MFPs aim to facilitate daily chores, usually performed by women and girls, through mechanization, and thereby free up time for income-generating activities, education and leisure. They usually target community-level women’s groups and involve the introduction of productive assets to reduce daily chores related to the basic transformation of foodstuffs (such as cereal mills or rice huskers), and/ or commercializing access to water and energy. Initially involving diesel-powered generators, available evaluations show that since 2016 these initiatives have integrated renewable energy solutions, in particular solar power. MFPs have also been deployed as part of early recovery initiatives with social cohesion objectives related to conflict prevention.

Evaluations covering MFPs present mixed results. On the one hand, they suggest that MFPs are highly relevant, simple and cost-effective interventions which provide meaningful gains for rural women, and, if done right, generate sufficient revenue to be self-sustainable.<sup>115</sup> As such, MFPs have attracted political support from host governments, as demonstrated by their engagement in projects and the scale of MFP roll-outs, and the central role of national programmes in scaling the installation of MFPs in rural areas (at least in Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania). Based on available evaluations, MFPs have continued to evolve and improve in their design, with the latest generation relying on solar power and piloting the integration of other bioenergy sources (Jatropha oil, biogas). Though more costly and difficult to maintain, these eliminate the need to regularly purchase and dispose of fuel.

113 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Mali, ICPE Burkina Faso, (2021) ICPE Chad; UNDP the Gambia (2014) DCPE.

114 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon.

115 See Soubeiga and Togola (2017), Final Project Evaluation d’appui à la mise en œuvre du programme national plateformes multifonctionnelles. In 2017, an MFP was evaluated to cost roughly \$4,300 (2,580,000 FCFA) in Mali, and 20 percent more in Burkina Faso (3,200,000 FCFA).

However, all evaluations covering MFPs have also raised concerns over their sustainability.<sup>116</sup> While there is positive evidence that UNDP has attempted to synthesise and disseminate lessons learned, for instance by commissioning an MFP stocktaking and strategy document in 2016, available evidence suggests that the challenges identified have not been fully resolved.<sup>117</sup> The viability of MFPs has been put into question by all evaluations. Beyond the cases where implementation shortcomings were found in relation to the quality of equipment or infrastructure, evaluations have highlighted various issues that suggest limitations in the feasibility studies and local analysis that preceded roll-out, resulting in the recurrent failure of MFPs to take off during or after project implementation.<sup>118</sup> Evaluations pointed to various issues related to: the viability of the income-generating activities being promoted; governance of, or sometimes conflict over, the ownership of the delivered assets; and lack of engagement of local authorities.<sup>119</sup>

Evaluation evidence raises questions as to whether MFPs are executed at the appropriate scale, and the extent to which the intervention model has been adapted and stabilized in the various implementation contexts over time. With a relatively cheap unit cost and possibility of rapid roll-out, MFPs were often implemented at large scale, covering large numbers of communities and geographic areas, but the extent of and conditions for sustainability remain unclear.

Available evaluations suggest that, in order to be successful and sustainable, an MFP must be accompanied by a host of other supporting interventions, including: support for transparent and collective governance; support for maintenance; support for the pursuit of income-generating activities, such as microcredit and coaching; integration of the MFP into local development plans; and an overarching national agency coordinating, supporting and monitoring MFPs. Experiences in Burkina Faso and Mali highlighted that the successful implementation of the model would likely depend on broader interventions in the ecosystem into which MFPs are implanted. Most notably, this would involve supporting the development of complementary agricultural activities, to ensure that mutually supportive activities are put in place to promote the success of the income-generating activities promoted, particularly in relation to agricultural transformation. Moreover, MFPs must be preceded by feasibility studies which validate that there is a real need, and that women in the community are ready to take on the project. Without this set of supporting interventions, MFPs may cease to operate or even generate local conflicts over assets.

116 UNDP (2013) Évaluation à mi-parcours de la seconde phase du programme national plates-formes multifonctionnelles pour la lutte contre la pauvreté au Burkina Faso et l'audit de matérialité des PTFM implantées de janvier 2010 au 30 juin 2013; UNDP Burkina Faso (2015) Final Evaluation of phase II (2010-2015) du programme national de plateformes multifonctionnelles pour la lutte contre la pauvreté (PN-PTFM/LCP) au Burkina Faso; Soubeiga & Togola (2017).

117 Emile André Damiba (2016) Development of a regional strategy to scale up rural agro-enterprises and systems to empower women in sub Saharan Africa.

118 Midterm and final evaluations both noted persistent failure of MFPs in the Burkina Faso national programme.

119 See, for instance, UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad: "UNDP made a positive contribution to community-level livelihood creation through income-generation activities and investments in small community infrastructure and productive assets such as marketplaces and multifunctional platforms. However, this support has been short-term and the contribution to longer-term objectives is not evident. Several project reports highlighted community tensions over the ownership and management of economic infrastructure, and challenges with the attribution of land for their construction."



**FINDING 14. Downstream work on livelihoods, including youth employment skills development, entrepreneurship and cash-for-work, often faces challenges to generate results beyond very localized impacts, due to the lack of connection with upstream national policies and capacity of the national public and private sectors.**

Throughout the region, UNDP has been active in supporting income-generation opportunities, particularly for women and youth. This is often in support of other thematic areas, such as environmental conservation, social cohesion or resilience. These interventions, often focused on particularly vulnerable and rural areas, have taken various forms, such as: skills programmes (the Gambia); cash-for-work (Guinea, Mali and Niger); youth entrepreneurship incubators and coaching (Burkina Faso and Cameroon);<sup>120</sup> MFPs (see Finding 13), agricultural value-chain development and microfinance (see below). Many evaluations recognize that such programming has been relevant and useful to its direct beneficiaries, and occasionally share quantitative outcomes reported by UNDP, such as the creation of 50 micro-enterprises through a project in Burkina Faso, or of 150 private-sector jobs in Cameroon.<sup>121</sup> However, these same evaluations also note that these projects missed their overall targets for jobs or enterprises created, due to limited resources, programme delivery issues and an unfavourable economic context.

Beyond their individual effectiveness, livelihood interventions were rarely integrated and often limited in their scale, reaching only a very small proportion of the country's youth, women and underemployed.<sup>122</sup> As such, they are best conceived of as pilots, to be linked to, or transformed into, larger programmes, scaled up by another donor with more financial resources than UNDP (or ideally, by the host government itself). However, interventions were often implemented as standalone programmes, not framed as pilots, and without plans for scaling up. The lack of a coherent, integrated, national strategy was noted, for instance, in Chad and Burkina Faso, while evaluations in Senegal and Guinea stressed the need for more explicit scaling strategies.<sup>123</sup>

UNDP did, in certain countries, pursue upstream initiatives such as: building the capacity of employment agencies (Senegal); partnering with a Government-led employment trust fund (Nigeria); supporting the development of youth employment strategies; and conducting surveys and studies to generate data on employment needs (Guinea).<sup>124</sup> As with other upstream interventions, these outputs occasionally struggled to translate to results on the ground. Amongst the most promising was the initiative to create municipal employment offices in Cameroon.<sup>125</sup> UNDP worked both upstream to create the institutional and legal framework, and downstream to build and operationalize these offices across the country. In this way, any support provided comes directly from a permanent State structure. However, it was too early to tell the results of this initiative at the time of the evaluation, as the offices were just becoming operational.

120 UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE; UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Mali, ICPR Cameroon, ICPE Burkina Faso.

121 Or indeed as many as 3,000 jobs, "although this could not be validated", as UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon notes.

122 See for instance UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE: "the portfolio is composed of a multitude of scattered interventions, which may follow one another without weaving a real operational programmatic continuity. This observation is particularly true of youth employment initiatives: 500 young people were initiated in job search programs and then left without follow-up; the experience of trade centers as incubators also remained without follow-up; the MDG Acceleration Framework was developed but not implemented; the Youth Employment Program was evaluated but without lessons being shared; the Socio-Economic Program for the Integration of Young People in the Post-Ebola Recovery, was revised without alleviating concerns about it, etc."

123 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE.

124 UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Nigeria.

125 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon.



UNDP supported youth skills development for employment and entrepreneurship in some countries (the Gambia, Mali and Nigeria) in response to high youth unemployment, driven in many countries by a mismatch between job seekers' skills and market demand.<sup>126</sup> Though evaluations acknowledge the strategic nature of this support, they also point to challenges in assessing outcomes beyond the implementation period of UNDP interventions, due to a lack of clear monitoring mechanisms. Furthermore they suggest that skills-development strategies were not well articulated, with insufficient engagement with key stakeholders, especially the private sector. A recent evaluation on Nigeria noted efforts to strengthen partnerships with the private sector and Government for youth skills development, though these were yet to yield tangible results.

In theory, the generation of employment and livelihood opportunities would be expected to require strong linkages with the private sector. In practice, evaluations suggest that UNDP engagement with the private sector in the subregion was relatively limited over the period under review.<sup>127</sup> In countries where engagement was attempted, results were often disappointing: an institutional framework for public-private partnerships did not materialize due to lack of funds in Chad; and partnerships with the mining sector were abandoned in Guinea over human rights concerns. Moreover, in its downstream interventions, UNDP has continued to privilege the establishment of cooperatives (e.g. for MFPs), despite some evaluative evidence suggesting that privately-owned MFPs have historically tended to be more sustainable than those under collective management.<sup>128</sup>

**FINDING 15. Interventions promoting access to finance have tended to increase financing availability, despite key policy and market factors being out of UNDP control. However, these initiatives have shown limited consideration for de-risking access to beneficiaries and loan delivery for finance institutions.**

Together with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), UNDP has supported the development of the microfinance sector in various Sahelian countries, in some cases since the 1990s. During the review period, however, microfinance interventions were limited to a few countries: Mauritania (predominantly upstream work on strategies and regulations); Guinea (upstream work on a strategy); Chad (upstream work on studies and a strategy, and downstream microcredit for environment-related jobs and projects); and Cameroon (upstream work on studies and a strategy, and downstream microcredit for businesses and producers' organizations).<sup>129</sup>

None of these interventions were particularly successful. For the upstream work, of the four countries where national inclusive finance strategies had been developed with the support of UNDP, none had been officially adopted, much less implemented, within four years of finalization. Similarly, a database of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Chad fell into disrepair due to a lack of resources and capacity to maintain it. At the downstream level, while evaluations in Chad and Cameroon noted some benefits

126 UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE; UNDP Mali (2020) Project evaluation; UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Nigeria.

127 See, for instance, UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso: "The evaluation noted a lack of collaboration with stakeholders in the private sector, even though this would have been very relevant to several UNDP interventions. For example, economic development initiatives could engage private actors to ensure greater sustainability and scale-up."

128 UNDP Burkina Faso (2016) Évaluation Finale de la Seconde Phase du Programme National Plateformes Multifonctionnelles pour la Lutte Contre La Pauvreté au Burkina Faso: "A comparison of MFPs shows that private MFPs largely perform better than community MFPs." This is attributed to the simpler governance structure and clearer economic incentives of the private structure.

129 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania, (2020) ICPR Cameroon; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE.

for immediate beneficiaries, both noted sustainability risks.<sup>130</sup> While microfinance funds are usually designed to be self-sustaining, recovery rates lower than 25 percent in certain projects (Chad) meant that funds were likely to run out quickly.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, as with MFPs, an influx of resources is not sufficient to ensure the existence or pursuit of profitable business activities, for which participants are likely to compete, especially in rural areas with few market opportunities.

Overall, challenges in linking upstream policy adoption with concrete measures that de-risk and promote the accessibility of finance for the most vulnerable populations targeted by UNDP, often translate into interventions that fall short of achieving their objectives. For example in Guinea, despite measures taken to improve the availability of financing through linking beneficiaries to MFIs, several evaluations noted the reluctance of beneficiaries to seek financing, and of institutions to provide loans.<sup>132</sup>

The viability of business plans is often mentioned as an important criterion, and concerns were often raised about the quality and duration of project support, market credit rates and the level of guarantees required by MFIs, which have remained a barrier for the most vulnerable beneficiaries to access financing. For example, in Guinea, UNDP was not able to convince MFIs to participate in a project for the development of biogas nationally, forcing it to opt for community-level co-financing and thus reduce the reach of the project.<sup>133</sup>

The evaluation sample also included a recent case showing encouraging results in supporting access to finance for family farms in rural areas, the 'Agri-finance' project in Burkina Faso. In this project, MFIs were familiarized and trained in agricultural value chains, and risk-taking by beneficiaries was incentivized by preferential credit rates.<sup>134</sup> The project managed to attract MFIs to the financing of agricultural opportunities in the entire agricultural value chain, shifting from a traditional focus on production. The final project evaluation noted important success factors including the successful participation of local technical services and MFIs in the review of business plans, to assess their viability, and support for beneficiaries throughout the production and loan cycle. While these measures were not always sufficient, the high participation and recovery rates reported highlighted the importance of adapting micro-loan cycles to the agricultural production cycle to maximize profit, and of considering insurance schemes to cover risks including climate and limit the potential debilitating effects for the most vulnerable borrowers.

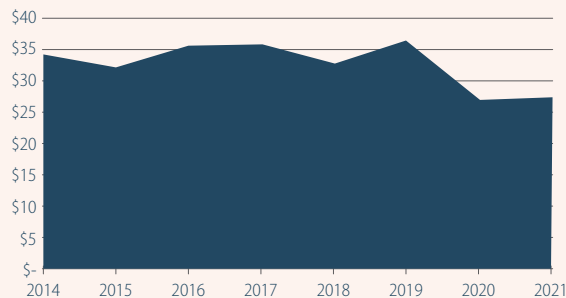
130 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, (2020) ICPR Cameroon.

131 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, ICPE Guinea.

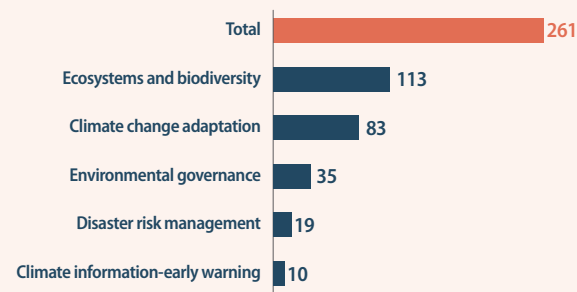
132 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Guinea.

133 UNDP Guinea (2021) Final project evaluation of Création d'un marché pour le développement et l'utilisation des ressources de biogaz en Guinée.

134 UNDP Burkina Faso (2019) Final programme evaluation of D'appui au financement adapté à l'agriculture familiale (AgriFinance-Burkina) 2015 – 2018.  
UNDP Senegal. Final project evaluation of Renforcement de la gestion des terres et des écosystèmes des Niayes et de la Casamance dans un contexte de changements climatiques.

**B. Environmental protection and climate change adaptation****FIGURE 16:**  
Trend in expenditure on environment  
and climate change Sahel region 2014-21  
(US\$ million)

Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022

**FIGURE 17:**  
Programme expenditure for environment  
and climate change Sahel region 2014-21  
(US\$ million)

Though not part of its original mandate, UNDP embraced environmental protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation throughout the period under review. The concept of ‘sustainable development’ was a key pillar of its 2014-2017 Strategic Plan (Sustainable Development Pathways), as well as of its 2018-2021 plan (Accelerate structural transformation for sustainable development) and its latest 2022-2025 plan (Structural transformation for green, inclusive and digital transitions). While it appeared somewhat less prominently in UNISS in 2013 (where it was included under the heading of ‘resilience’, with a focus on natural resource management), it became a key pillar of UNSPS 2017 (Building resilience to climate change, and decreasing natural resource scarcity, malnutrition and food insecurity). Recently it has lost some of its prominence, as the new UNDP Sahel Offer focuses narrowly on renewable energy.

The two main areas of spending in the region were ecosystems and biodiversity, and climate change adaptation. These areas together made up over three-quarters of total expenditure, and consisted predominantly of downstream work, frequently involving ‘green livelihood’ opportunities. UNDP also invested upstream in environmental governance work, disaster risk management, and climate information and early warning systems. In total, it spent about \$261 million in this area, or 15 percent of total programme expenditure for the period under review. Much of the UNDP funding in this thematic area came in the form of project funding provided by GEF. Despite some concentration of spending in Mali (22 percent), the portfolio was otherwise relatively evenly spread across all ten countries. UNDP interventions on environmental, climate change and biodiversity issues were focused on countries in fragile and conflict-affected settings, namely Mali (22 percent), Niger (14 percent), Burkina Faso (12 percent) and Nigeria (12 percent).

**FINDING 16. UNDP upstream support has contributed to improved environmental understanding, awareness and regulation, both nationally and subnationally. However, environmental issues are not always the first concern of national stakeholders, and a continuous effort for engagement, communications and advocacy is required to sustain interest and entrench new policies.**

UNDP has a regional track record of contributing to environmental governance, for instance having supported Cameroon's first National Environmental Management Plan back in 1996. On this basis, it has become "recognized by national counterparts as the main interlocutor on issues related to the environment and climate change".<sup>135</sup> Several evaluations recognize UNDP contributions to: improved knowledge about environmental phenomena by setting up climate information systems (e.g. Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali);<sup>136</sup> the development of environmental policies, strategies and regulatory frameworks (e.g. in Cameroon, the Gambia and Guinea); mainstreaming environmental considerations through national, subnational and sectoral adaptation plans (e.g. in Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal); and a cross-cutting focus on capacity-development across its activities (Burkina Faso and Mali).<sup>137</sup>

This work has raised awareness of environmental issues and increased stakeholder knowledge and capacity. However, tools, policies and instruments developed with UNDP support have not always been adopted, operationalized or deployed. This issue arose, for instance, with instruments promoted by UNDP-supported projects: in Cameroon, where the adoption of access and benefit sharing (ABS) legislation is pending; in Nigeria, where the adoption of drafted laws to reduce dioxin emissions from open burning sources is pending; in Guinea, where the endorsement of documents and instruments to incorporate Rio Convention objectives is pending, in the Gambia, where the adoption of policies and institutional building blocks for improved coastal defences is pending, with little interest from the Government; and in Burkina Faso, where the adoption of texts for sustainable land management is pending.<sup>138</sup> While these projects were all relatively successful in supporting downstream activities in their respective areas, they struggled to institutionalize successes at the policy level, as government interest in the environment fluctuated. For instance, in Mauritania, a project on environmental regulations for extractive industries lost much of the attention of stakeholders following an economic crisis and a decline in oil prices and production.<sup>139</sup>

135 UNDP IEO Chad (2021), UNDP IEO Chad (2022).

136 See also UNDP Burkina Faso (2019) Final Evaluation of Generating global environmental benefits through better planning and decision-making systems at the local level in Burkina Faso; UNDP Mali (2016) Terminal evaluation of Enhancing Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector in Mali; UNDP IEO (2017) ADR Cameroon, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPE Mali.

137 UNDP IEO (2017) ADR Cameroon, (2016) ADR Mauritania, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPE Mali; UNDP the Gambia (2014) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE.

138 See, respectively: UNDP Cameroon (2019) Final independent project evaluation of A Bottom-up approach to ABS: Community level capacity development for successful engagement in ABS value chains in Cameroon (Echinops giganteus and Mondia whitei); UNDP Nigeria (2015) Terminal evaluation report Less burnt for a clean earth: minimization of dioxin emission from open burning sources in Nigeria; UNDP Guinea (2018) Final Evaluation report Renforcement de la Gestion Décentralisée de l'Environnement pour répondre aux objectifs des Conventions de Rio en Guinée; UNDP the Gambia (2018) Terminal Evaluation Report Enhancing Resilience of Vulnerable Coastal Areas and Communities to the Impact of Climate Change in the Gambia; UNDP Burkina Faso (2016) Final Evaluation report for Première phase du sous-programme coordination nationale du programme national de partenariat pour la gestion durable des terres au Burkina Faso.

139 UNDP Mauritania (2016) Final Evaluation Report of Projet de partenariat pour intégrer la biodiversité marine et côtière dans le développement du secteur des hydrocarbures en Mauritanie.

**FINDING 17.** Complementary to its upstream work, UNDP has invested significantly, with GEF funding, in downstream interventions designed to preserve ecosystems and simultaneously promote sustainable livelihoods. Success in this area has proved challenging, as it requires a close reading of local needs and capacity, ongoing support, and great care in monitoring the quality of activities and outputs.

UNDP downstream environmental work includes: the promotion of agro-silvo-pastoral best practices to rural populations (e.g. in Cameroon, Guinea and Mauritania);<sup>140</sup> improved management or restoration of protected areas (Burkina Faso and Chad); major public works for coastline rehabilitation or irrigation (Guinea); the provision of small-scale infrastructure such as solar-powered MFPs in a range of countries; and a host of income-generating activities such as ecotourism, beekeeping, oyster harvesting or reforestation (Guinea and the Gambia ).<sup>141</sup> In some cases, these initiatives appear to have yielded significant, measurable results. One project in Chad led to a 5 percent reduction in fires, a 35 percent reduction in illegal hunting, and the reappearance of species which had previously been eradicated locally. Many environmentally-oriented downstream interventions were multidimensional, integrating aspects of good governance, livelihood development and social cohesion.<sup>142</sup>

However, the ability to deliver compelling downstream results hinges on a number of factors, which were not always present, thus many projects did not attain their intended results and faced a low likelihood of sustainability. These factors included the inappropriate estimation of resources needed, either because the costs of construction work or services were underestimated, or the possibilities for co-funding overestimated.<sup>143</sup> Many projects set out with high expectations of co-funding from host governments, which were rarely fulfilled, meaning that projects had to curtail activities as their budgets were cut, often by half or more.<sup>144</sup>

140 See also UNDP Guinea (2018) Final Assessment of Strengthening resilience of farming communities' livelihoods against climate changes in the Guinean Prefectures of Gaoual, Koundara and Mali, (2016) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2017) ADR Cameroon, (2016) ADR Mauritania.

141 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP the Gambia (2014) DCPE.

142 UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE.

143 UNDP Mali (2020) Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la résilience des groupements de femmes productrices et des communautés vulnérables aux changements climatiques au Mali, Régions de Koulikoro, Kayes et Sikasso; UNDP Burkina Faso (2019) Final Evaluation of Generating global environmental benefits through better planning and decision-making systems at the local level in Burkina Faso.

144 See, for instance: UNDP Guinea (2019) Midterm evaluation of Adaptation basée sur les écosystèmes des communautés vulnérables de la région de la haute-Guinée: (\$114 million in co-funding expected, zero received at the time of the mid-term evaluation); UNDP Nigeria (2015) Terminal evaluation of Less burnt for a clean earth: minimization of dioxin emission from open burning sources in Nigeria (Government committed to \$20 million, provided \$11 million at closure, mostly in-kind); UNDP Mali (2020) Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la résilience des groupements de femmes productrices et des communautés vulnérables aux changements climatiques au Mali, régions de Koulikoro, Kayes et Sikasso (\$16.5 million in co-financing expected, \$500,000 received at project closure); UNDP Guinea (2018) Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la Gestion Décentralisée de l'Environnement pour répondre aux objectifs des Conventions de Rio en Guinée (\$250,000 committed by the Government, roughly a fifth of project funding, but none received at project closure); UNDP Cameroon (2019) Final Evaluation of A Bottom-up approach to ABS: Community level capacity development for successful engagement in ABS value chains in Cameroon (total budget of \$2.6 million at inception, but less than \$1 million at project closure, as much of government funding fell through); UNDP Niger (2019) Final Evaluation of Régionalisation de l'Adaptation à Base Communautaire au Niger (total budget of \$19 million at inception, and of \$14 million at project closure); UNDP the Gambia (2018) Terminal Evaluation Report for Enhancing Resilience of Vulnerable Coastal Areas and Communities to the Impact of Climate Change in the Gambia (the Government committed \$25 million at inception, and provided none by project closure).

In addition, several projects set out with unrealistic expectations given the challenging operational realities in the Sahel. For example, the evaluation of the Ecovillage project in Senegal concluded that community capacity was too low to absorb many of the innovations promoted by the project, and that some community members were too poor to risk trying new methods.<sup>145</sup> Some projects failed to undertake basic adjustments, resulting in issues such as the distribution of educational materials to communities in a language that they could not read, or providing farmers with cell phones in areas without network coverage.<sup>146</sup> Some projects had successes, such as one in Mali which supported the local design and production of water gauges to measure rainfall, using materials and techniques adapted to the local context.<sup>147</sup> Ultimately, interventions need to be tailored to their specific context and communities, a lesson also noted in the inclusive growth area.<sup>148</sup>

Many projects provided one-off training, services or assets to communities, expecting them to subsequently absorb these successfully. Yet transformation – whether it is changing harmful environmental behaviours, adopting new income-generating activities, or managing new assets (such as solar panels or productive tools) – requires ongoing, long-term, repeated support, in some cases across several project cycles.<sup>149</sup> Where this was not provided, project investments risked becoming ‘development ruins’. This was forecast in the evaluation of a project in Mali, noting that communities had not been properly equipped to use newly-built irrigation equipment, and thus were not likely to use, maintain, or benefit from it. Similarly, an evaluation of a project in Burkina Faso noted that two newly established communal land-title services would likely fail to operate unless the project extended its support for some time.<sup>150</sup>

145 UNDP Senegal (2018) Final Evaluation of Préservation participative de la biodiversité et développement faiblement émissif en carbone d’écovillages pilotes à proximité des aires protégées du Sénégal.

146 Respectively, UNDP Mali (2018) Final Evaluation of Phase II de l’Initiative Pauvreté Environnement Mali; and UNDP Niger (2016) Final Evaluation of Mise en œuvre des interventions prioritaires du PANA pour renforcer les capacités de résilience et d’adaptation des secteurs de l’agriculture et de l’eau au changement climatique au Niger.

147 UNDP Mali/ GEF (2016) Terminal Evaluation: Enhancing Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector in Mali.

148 The importance of adapting environmental interventions to the country context, engaging local stakeholders and incorporating local knowledge was noted across a vast number of project evaluations, including: UNDP Chad (2016) Final Evaluation of Projet Conservation et Utilisation Durable de la Biodiversité dans le Moyen-Chari; UNDP Mali (2020) Final Evaluation of Projet Fonds Climat à Kita”, (2016) Terminal Evaluation of Enhancing Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector in Mali (co-funded by GEF and involving locally produced and designed rain gauges), (2017) Final project evaluation of Enhancing Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector in Mali (co-funded by Canada), (2020) Terminal Evaluation of Programme d’Accroissement de la Productivité Agricole au Mali (involving the use of local language radio to disseminate messages into remote and insecure areas), (2018) Final Evaluation of Expansion and Strengthening of Mali’s Protected Area System; UNDP Guinea (2018) Final Assessment of Strengthening resilience of farming communities’ livelihoods against climate changes in the Guinean Prefectures of Gaoual, Koundara and Mali (involving the production and dissemination of locally appropriate education materials).

149 See UNDP Guinea (2018) Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la Gestion Décentralisée de l’Environnement pour répondre aux objectifs des Conventions de Rio en Guinée, which notes that 2-3 years are not sufficient to entrench microprojects, which will likely fail without additional support, and UNDP Burkina Faso (2018) Final Evaluation of Sous-programme centre-ouest du programme national de partenariat pour la gestion durable des terres au Burkina Faso, which notes that without further project support, new local services to adjudicate land claims will not become operational.

150 UNDP Mali (2020), Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la résilience des groupements de femmes productrices et des communautés vulnérables aux changements climatiques au Mali, Régions de Koulikoro, Kayes et Sikasso; and UNDP Burkina Faso (2018) Final Evaluation of Sous-programme centre-ouest du programme national de partenariat pour la gestion durable des terres (CPP-CP) au Burkina Faso.



Finally, several downstream environmental projects were undermined by poor quality implementation. Though often small, operational issues added up to the point of affecting results. In one project in Guinea, for example, otherwise useful activities were undermined by delays in the provision of seeds, the low reliability of meteorological predictions, and the poor quality of construction (for instance for MFPs). In Mali, construction issues similarly undermined community utilization and economic and environmental benefits in two different projects.<sup>151</sup>

**FINDING 18. While livelihood and conservation outcomes tend to mutually reinforce each other, some projects experienced tensions between environmental and economic considerations.**

In general, the consideration of livelihoods is key to the success of environmental projects, as it allows conservation goals (and long-term interests) to be aligned with the short-term economic incentives and challenging realities of target communities.<sup>152</sup> One project in Nigeria, for instance, successfully encouraged farmers to burn less of their agricultural waste (and reduce harmful emissions) by building their capacity to turn this waste into manure, and thereby realize its value.<sup>153</sup>

In other instances, however, economic and environmental incentives may not align. For example, more sustainable behaviour may require a move away from economically lucrative activities which *en masse* depleted environmental resources. Without a strong and compelling case, and social compact, for the adoption of more sustainable livelihood activities, the exploitation of natural resources is likely to continue. This was noted in Chad, where funds earmarked for income-generation activities linked to preserving biodiversity were used by beneficiaries for other activities not linked to conservation. In Niger, a project which initially focused on adaptation measures drifted towards a livelihood focus as it responded to local needs, leading the evaluation to note that its environmental benefits had become difficult to discern.<sup>154</sup>

**FINDING 19. Despite a variety of upstream and downstream interventions, the overall impact of UNDP programming on the environment remains small, fragmented, and difficult to measure.**

Several evaluations noted that intended results in this area were not achieved, and that few visible improvements for planet or people were observable. In some cases this was due to idiosyncratic issues in the delivery of project outputs, for example when a platform for the dissemination of climate information in Burkina Faso failed to materialize due to poor project management.<sup>155</sup> More frequently, even when outputs were satisfactorily delivered, these did not translate into intended outcomes.

151 UNDP Guinea (2019) Midterm evaluation of Adaptation basée sur les écosystèmes des communautés vulnérables de la région de la haute-Guinée; UNDP Mali (2020) Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la résilience des groupements de femmes productrices et des communautés vulnérables aux changements climatiques au Mali, Régions de Koulikoro, Kayes et Sikasso, and (2020) Midterm evaluation of Appui à la mise en œuvre de la stratégie nationale d'adaptation aux changements climatiques du Mali.

152 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso.

153 UNDP Nigeria (2015) Terminal evaluation Less Burn for a Clean Earth: minimization of dioxin emission from open burning sources in Nigeria.

154 See: UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, Final Evaluation of Projet Conservation et Utilisation Durable de la Biodiversité dans le Moyen-Chari; and UNDP Niger (2019) Final Evaluation of Scaling up community-based adaptation (CBA) in Niger, respectively.

155 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso.

For instance, in Cameroon, communities were trained in improved agro-silvo-pastoral practices, but did not subsequently adopt them.<sup>156</sup> In Mauritania, natural resource plans and planning capacity were strengthened both nationally and subnationally, but did not translate into changes on the ground.<sup>157</sup>

Evaluations attributed such limited results to four factors:

- The first is the absence of local capacity and resources within governments (especially subnationally), which inhibited the implementation of even the best-designed plans. This 'low-capacity' barrier was noted in in Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania, for example.<sup>158</sup> In the latter, one project evaluation concluded that decentralized administrations lacked the resources and capacity to deliver on some of the ambitious environmental initiatives, notwithstanding the projects and funds offered by the project.<sup>159</sup>
- The second factor is the absence of a coherent UNDP strategy in the area, as noted in Burkina Faso, the Gambia and Mauritania.<sup>160</sup> GEF financing was identified as contributing to strategic fragmentation, as it encouraged UNDP to pursue project-by-project funding opportunities as opposed to building a coherent and integrated programme.
- The third factor is measurement. Evaluations often struggled to capture outcomes, either due to the timing of the evaluation (right at the end of a project), or due to the inherent difficulty of evaluating sustainable benefits for an ecosystem (e.g., Burkina Faso and Mali).<sup>161</sup>
- The fourth factor is scale. Several successful pilot initiatives remained just that - a project focused on a specific region, without a clear plan (from the project, UNDP or government) to replicate its successes in other areas.<sup>162</sup>

For all of these reasons, and despite the significance of individual upstream or downstream achievements set out above, evaluations rarely found UNDP environmental work to be transformational, beyond heavily localized impacts.

156 UNDP IEO (2017) ADR Cameroon.

157 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania.

158 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso ; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE.

159 UNDP Burkina Faso (2018) Final Evaluation of Sous-programme centre-ouest du programme national de partenariat pour la gestion durable des terres (CPP-CP) au Burkina Faso.

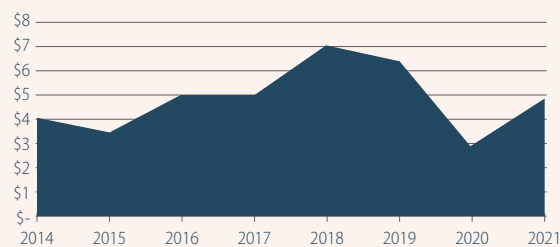
160 UNDP Burkina Faso (2014) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania; UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE.

161 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Mali, ICPE Burkina Faso.

162 See, for instance, UNDP Niger (2019) Final Evaluation of Régionalisation de l'Adaptation à Base Communautaire au Niger (ABC-Maradi), which rated the project a success and recommended it for scaling, but noted the absence of corresponding planning to support this. Other evaluations noted that projects were too localized to be rated as having had social, environmental or institutional impact (e.g., UNDP Mali (2020) Final Evaluation of Renforcement de la résilience des groupements de femmes productrices et des communautés vulnérables aux changements climatiques au Mali, régions de Koulikoro, Kayes et Sikasso). Going against this trend, one project in Nigeria, funded by UNDP in two states, was replicated by the implementing Federal Ministry of the Environment in two other states. The strong ownership of the Government, which served as both implementing and financing partner (with an \$11 million contribution), was likely to have contributed to this outcome.



## C. Energy

**FIGURE 18:**  
Trend of expenditure Sahel region  
2014-21 (US\$ million)

Source: Extracted from Atlas based on IEO classification, March 2022

**FIGURE 19:**  
Programme expenditure for energy  
Sahel region 2014-21 (US\$ million)

UNDP involvement in the area of energy is more recent than its work in other thematic areas. Largely absent from its 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, energy was identified as one of six areas of work in the 2018-2021 UNDP Strategic Plan, and the subsequent 2022-2025 organization-wide plan. Similarly, energy was largely absent from UNISS in 2013, and broadly identified among the activities of the UNDP Sahel strategy. Mentioned more explicitly in UNSPS 2018, it has grown to become one of the three key pillars of new UNDP Sahel Offer in 2021.

UNDP has supported energy-related interventions in the Sahel since 2014, and previously at a moderate scale. Of all the thematic areas explored in this synthesis, projects specific to energy saw by far the lowest level of expenditure, at 2 percent of total programme expenditure, though expenditure levels grew between 2014 and 2019. Work concentrated on two sub-areas: renewable energy (77 percent of expenditure), in particular through expanding access to renewable energy solutions; and energy-efficiency initiatives. Initiatives promoting access to renewable energy sources, covered by evaluations, have mainly concerned solar and bio energy (Jatropha oil and biogas). Overall, expenditure was \$38.4 million, mainly implemented in five countries, which covered 85 percent of programme expenditure on energy, and heavily concentrated in two countries, Niger and Nigeria, which together make up 55 percent of total spending. As with the environmental projects, much of UNDP work in this area was driven by GEF funding.

UNDP interventions specific to the area of energy-efficiency have been less prominent in the Sahel, and were implemented in less fragile and more mature energy sectors. While more limited than initiatives in the area of access to renewable energy in terms of spread, and concentrated in select countries, they nevertheless represented 23 percent of expenditure in the area of energy between 2014 and 2021 (\$8.8 million). This work has been concentrated in Nigeria in the area of sustainable fuelwood management, and in Senegal in the area of thermal insulation.

**FINDING 20. UNDP has been successfully piloting and integrating its energy offer into its existing rural development initiatives in various Sahel countries to promote energy-efficiency and the transition towards renewable energy, mostly through off-grid solar energy solutions. While solar energy solutions have immediate positive benefits at community level, supply risks remain a challenge for their sustainability and scale-up.**

UNDP implemented various energy-related initiatives in its programmes in the Sahel, including some energy-specific interventions, but mainly as activities integrated into existing programme areas, notably in the areas of environment and local development. At the upstream level, evaluations highlight evidence that legal frameworks, policies, strategies and action plans for renewable energy were adopted (e.g. the 2030 National Sustainable Energy for All Strategy in Guinea), and the capacity of key units and departments strengthened (e.g. in Chad and Mauritania).

At the downstream level, available evaluations highlighted the concerted efforts of UNDP to gradually integrate renewable energy into some of its pre-existing intervention activities, such as through the local distribution and production of cooking stoves, the provision of irrigation water, income-generating activities, health centres and other community-level infrastructure. These brought significant immediate benefits to target communities, both in terms of improved access and/or cost of accessing energy. Access to solar energy has been mostly implemented through existing project interventions, such as biodiversity and natural resource conservation work, and in particular through the MFPs that UNDP has rolled out in various countries.

In the context of MFPs, renewable energy was introduced as part of the general service offer of the platform and/or to replace diesel-powered generators for the productive assets delivered by the projects. Cases from evaluations have mainly focused on off-grid solar energy through mini-grids, and grid solutions piloted through MFPs. Overall, experiences with grid and mini-grid solutions explored in evaluations have not demonstrated any concrete results, and faced challenges in implementation due to technical shortcomings,<sup>163</sup> and in ensuring the coordination and collaboration of existing providers at local level.<sup>164</sup>

Overall, platforms that introduced renewable energy solutions suffered from similar implementation challenges as traditional platforms, noted in evaluations covering traditional MFPs and those that introduced an energy offer. As described earlier, challenges were noted with the overall sustainability of the MFP beyond project duration and supervision and access to financing, leading to recurrent needs for external rehabilitation of the platforms by UNDP. While the introduction of solar systems is highlighted

163 UNDP Mauritania (2020) Final Evaluation of GEF Hybrid mini grids in Mauritania.

164 UNDP Mali (2017) Final project evaluation of Appui à la mise en œuvre du programme national plateformes multifonctionnelles au Mali.

as significant, and generates important and immediate benefits in the energy mix of communities, it can also amplify other unresolved maintenance challenges in the intervention model, and financing and maintenance remained a challenge in the MFP model. In addition to the availability of materials, the accessibility of rural areas presents an additional cost for maintenance which has continued to affect the viability of MFPs and is further amplified for solar technologies. While supply risks are an important factor for the competitiveness and viability of solar solutions, evidence also suggests that they can present new environmental risks, notably with the management of used battery waste which, as one evaluation noted, had not been considered in the implementation strategy.<sup>165</sup>

**FINDING 21. UNDP pilots for the development of bioenergy solutions achieved mixed results, simultaneously demonstrating their multiple benefits in promoting rural electrification and agricultural development, and the considerable efforts required to support the market competitiveness and sustainability of bioenergy value chains.**

UNDP conducted several pilots of various sizes for the development of bioenergy, through their gradual introduction in its interventions. Available evaluations present pilots for the development of *Jatropha* and neem oil for their biofuel potential and the development of biogas in rural areas.

Biofuels gained increased popularity in the early 2000s in a context of increased oil prices, and thus the development of *Jatropha* oil became a popular solution and opportunity to offset and eventually replace diesel-related expenses for rural areas. While neem oil was only found in Niger,<sup>166</sup> the development of *Jatropha* oil as a source of biofuel was tested in several countries and project interventions (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal). *Jatropha* Curcas grains present the important benefit of not being a comestible species and therefore does not constitute a competitive crop as far as land tenure is concerned. *Jatropha* plants are also adapted to semi-arid climate and hold great potential for preventing soil erosion and promoting carbon sequestration.

Initial pilots could be traced to the gradual energy diversification of MFPs, as a supplement and/or replacement for diesel.<sup>167</sup> Overall, experiences presented in evaluations were highlighted as relevant, but did not meet the high expectations of its potential due to the availability of *Jatropha* oil in the context of MFPs, the length of maturity of *Jatropha* shrubs (3-5 years), and the below-expected and highly variable yield of *Jatropha* plants. Efforts to develop the sector attempted through MFPs, ecovillages and other longer-term dedicated programmes in Mali and Burkina Faso highlighted similar challenges.

The evaluations of the two national programmes supported by UNDP in Mali and Burkina Faso were comprehensive, and showed success in increasing the plantation of *Jatropha* and setting up an initial regulatory framework for the sector, though not without challenges.<sup>168</sup> The evaluations remain rather

165 UNDP Burkina Faso (2016) Final Evaluation of second phase (2010-2015) of the multifunctional platform national programme for the fight against poverty.

166 UNDP Niger (2016) Final Evaluation of Integration of Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions in Niger's Rural Energy Service Access Program.

167 UNDP Mali (2017) Final project evaluation of Appui à la mise en œuvre du programme national plateformes multifonctionnelles au Mali; UNDP Burkina Faso (2016) Final Evaluation of second phase (2010-2015) programme of the multifunctional platform national programme for the fight against poverty.

168 UNDP Burkina Faso (2020) Final project evaluation of Promotion du *jatropha curcas* comme source de agrocarburant durable au Burkina Faso; UNDP Mali (2016) Final project evaluation of Promotion de la production et de l'utilisation de l'huile de *Jatropha* comme biocarburant durable au Mali.

evasive and inconclusive in terms of the adoption and use of *Jatropha* oil as biofuel. One challenge that remained to be addressed, noted in both experiences, was related to market linkages between production and transformation units. They pointed to difficulties of ensuring that supply is sufficient to promote viable decentralized transformation units, and/or that the costs of transportation to centralized transformation units did not affect the competitiveness of *Jatropha* as a source for biofuels. Nevertheless, positive benefits were highlighted in terms of supporting income diversification through the sale of *Jatropha* plants, seeds, oil and by-products such as soap and fertilizer, but also through its use to delimit plantation plots, which reportedly has helped to mitigate land disputes.

It is important to consider, however, that all project evaluations reviewed presented cases of implementation in a context of a drop in global commodity prices, a severe constraint for the adoption of *Jatropha* oil as a biofuel and consolidation of the sector. In this regard, evaluations of national programmes conducted over five-year periods recommended to pursue and consolidate results in a longer timeframe, valuing the potential and benefits observed on the ground, while at the same time highlighting the considerable efforts required to develop and integrate new value chains.

While initial evidence on the introduction of biogas could be found, for instance in the context of the national Ecovillage programme in Senegal or the national MFP programmes in Mauritania, Mali and Burkina Faso, these have remained a small share of energy solutions tested through these projects. In Guinea, however, UNDP had a specific project aimed at creating a market for the development and use of biogas. In this case, UNDP was able to successfully support the capacity of local small enterprises (masonry, construction etc.) to produce biodigesters, support the drafting of regulatory frameworks, and finance the purchase of biodigesters for beneficiaries.

Early signs of uptake and scale-up of this work emerged at the end of the project, with the Government setting up a national agency for the development of biogas, though this development is somewhat uncertain with the ongoing political transition in Guinea in 2021.<sup>169</sup> A country programme evaluation conducted a year after the final project evaluation further confirmed the success of the intervention, evidenced by the level of uptake and adaptation of technology in rural communities.<sup>170</sup> However, shortcomings were also found to have affected the sustainable integration and use of biodigesters. Notably, the evaluations noted missed opportunities to more purposefully target livestock farms and areas, as the lack of feedstock, also influenced by seasons, constitutes an important barrier for the use of biodigesters.<sup>171</sup>

While a successful experience overall, less consideration was given to ensure that technical barriers for biodigesters (feedstock and water) were fully met.<sup>172</sup> This presented some challenges for the adoption of biodigesters at household level, and a missed opportunity for the project to influence and adapt

169 UNDP Guinea (2021) Final Evaluation of Projet de Création d'un marché pour le développement et l'utilisation des ressources de biogaz en Guinée

170 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Guinea.

171 The evaluation of the Ecovillage programme in Senegal and ICPE Guinea noted that more specific targeting of areas with large livestock populations could have favoured the success of the pilot and also opened opportunities to influence agricultural practices.

172 World Bank (2019) The Power of Dung: Lessons learned from on-farm biodigester programs in Africa: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/468451557843529960/pdf/The-Power-of-Dung-Lessons-Learned-from-On-Farm-Biodigester-Programs-in-Africa.pdf>.

agricultural practices within the framework of agro-energy strategies.<sup>173</sup> This was demonstrated in the same project, where, in some localities in high and middle Guinea, the roll-out of biogas overlapped with aquaculture and adaptation activities with more success. The fact that biodigesters can be locally sourced at relatively low cost, and provide both an energy solution and organic fertilizer, has provided an additional incentive for adoption at community level and integration with other income-generating activities promoted.

**FINDING 22. Interventions in the energy sector have had limited success in sustainably de-risking and incentivizing markets for renewable and energy-efficient solutions, due to the lack of private sector participation and challenges in sustaining public and private sector engagement within the timeframe of GEF projects.**

The lack of participation of the private sector has been raised as a significant impediment to the success, uptake and scaling of UNDP interventions in various settings, and is not specific to interventions in the energy sector or the Sahel.<sup>174</sup> However, similar shortfalls were found to have affected most UNDP energy-specific interventions in the area of renewable and energy-efficiency initiatives. This remains a significant issue, given the expected role of the private sector in accelerating green transition in the energy sector.

UNDP did include private sector engagement to varying degrees in its energy-related initiatives, but this often did not materialize as expected. For instance, several projects budgeted for significant private sector investment, sometimes 'securing' specific investors at project launch. However, these sums were sometimes very ambitious. For example, one project in Nigeria budgeted for over £200 million in private sector investment, compared to a UNDP/GEF budget of \$1.5 million. At midterm, only 3 percent of that co-financing had materialized, owing partly to fiscal constraints on the Government's part in offering 'guarantees' to private investors. Similar, lower than anticipated amounts of private funding resulted in delays to or downscaling of projects in Senegal, Niger and Mauritania, with evaluations noting unrealistic expectations and the absence of clear fundraising and risk mitigation plans.

Private sector engagement also posed some challenges in the effectiveness of value chain development supported by UNDP, such as for the development of *Jatropha*. In these cases, evaluations found that projects had limited effects on incentivizing private sector engagement to bridge the necessary gaps in the transformation value chain between supply and transformation, and in turn to provide market guarantees for participating smallholder producers.<sup>175</sup>

Evaluations of energy specific initiatives often presented cases where government commitment had somewhat faded, with reduced government funding and participation, which is also a prerogative for private sector engagement. While evaluations provide various explanations, one factor is that all energy-specific projects implemented in the Sahel were set up with GEF financing, which includes a

173 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Guinea.

174 See UNDP IEO thematic evaluations: (2022) UNDP support to energy access and transition, (2021) UNDP support to conflict affected countries, UNDP support to Climate Change Adaptation, UNDP support to development cooperation in Middle Income countries.

175 UNDP Burkina Faso (2020) Final Evaluation of Promotion du *jatropha curcas* comme source de agrocarburant durable au Burkina Faso; UNDP Mali (2016) Final project evaluation of Promotion de la production et de L'utilisation de l'huile de *Jatropha* comme biocarburant durable au Mali.

lengthy two-year preparatory phase before project approval. In Mauritania, the negotiation period leading to the adoption of the project did not allow for the leveraging of partnerships and synergies with partners identified during the project preparation and design phase.<sup>176</sup>

As raised in a recent thematic evaluation of UNDP support to access to energy and transition, this common trend in energy programming presents risks for the relevance of initiatives promoted, and also jeopardizes partnerships in a fast-moving sector and operational environment.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, the local production of improved cooking stoves promoted by UNDP through its biodiversity and land management programming remained small in scale and did not attract private sector engagement, which would have helped scale up these initiatives. In the context of the biogas initiative in Guinea, the financing modalities, which involved support from financial institutions and MFIs, could not materialize due to risk-resistance, and more generally to pre-existing barriers that limit access and financing demand from smallholders;<sup>178</sup> and a similar situation persists for the maintenance and sustainability of MFPs.<sup>179</sup>

While evaluations do not systematically present the causes of these shortcomings, it can be observed that the transfer of technology and practices induced by interventions presents some inherent risks, especially given the pilot nature which may not always create an attractive value proposition for private sector actors. In this regard, available evaluations suggest that many energy projects suffered both operational and strategic challenges.

At the operational level, projects suffered significant start-up delays of almost two years, and in several cases suffered contracting and procurement challenges, resulting in little or no local infrastructure being delivered on time and budget (for example in the projects for mini-grids in Mauritania, thermal insulation materials in Senegal, *Jatropha* in Burkina Faso, and de-risking renewable energy in Nigeria).<sup>180</sup> In most cases, it is unclear whether these challenges were specifically related to energy, or idiosyncratically related to the resources and capacity of UNDP and the host government.

Only in certain cases were sector-specific challenges noted. For example, in Nigeria, major investments in power plants were delayed due to issues associated with resettling 300 households, which took much more time and money than anticipated. In Mauritania, a type of solar-powered mill was found to be inadequate for community needs, meaning non-solar mills were needed as a complement. Overall, however, there was not enough evidence to identify whether sector-specific challenges were one-off or systemic.

176 UNDP Mauritania (2014) Midterm Evaluation of Partenariat pour intégrer la biodiversité marine et côtière dans le développement du secteur des hydrocarbures en Mauritanie; UNDP (2015) Terminal evaluation of sustainable Management of globally significant endemic ruminant livestock of west Africa.

177 UNDP IEO (2021) Evaluation of UNDP support to access to Energy and Transition.

178 UNDP Guinea (2021) Final Evaluation of Projet de Création d'un marché pour le développement et l'utilisation des ressources de biogaz en Guinée.

179 MFP evaluations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania.

180 The Nigeria 'de-risking renewables project' was launched in June 2016, the inception workshop took place in May 2017, and the project manager was only hired in January of 2018. In Mauritania, the project document for the 'mini-grids' project was signed at the end of 2016, but the project was only launched in 2018.

## 2.4 Cross-cutting synthesis findings

**FINDING 23.** UNDP resource-mobilization varied across time and countries. While it was able to exceed its targets in some country programmes, this was rarely driven by broad-based strategic partnerships, and more often due to acute emergencies, single-source vertical funding, or fragmented project grants. In most countries, the great need, challenging funding environment and inconsistent fundraising strategy has resulted in severe resource constraints and fragmentation of the UNDP portfolio, which greatly affected results.

It is almost commonplace to note that ‘funding constraints’ inhibited UNDP action. In the Sahel, the picture is nuanced, as in some cases UNDP exceeded its resource-mobilization targets, such as for the country programmes in Cameroon 2008-2012, the Gambia 2017-2021, Guinea 2014-2015 or Senegal 2012-2017, or came close to attaining its goals, such as in Cameroon, Chad and Mali.<sup>181</sup> In some cases (e.g. the Gambia, Niger or Senegal), evaluations suggest that this was at least in part driven by successful UNDP resource-mobilization strategies. Counterpart funding from host governments remains low and inconsistent in the region, with few exceptions. In Senegal, the Government represented the single largest UNDP funding partner, with a contribution of almost 60 percent to the country programme, a standout amount not seen anywhere else in the region, due to a strong commitment from the Government to a major flagship rural development project.<sup>182</sup>

More often, notable fundraising figures were driven by few or even single sources of funding (the Government in Senegal, the Global Fund in Chad and Mali), temporary peaking due to an emergency response (for Ebola in Guinea for example).<sup>183</sup> While UNDP was able to broaden its donor base in some countries (e.g. Niger and Senegal), this was not always a net positive, with some evaluations noting that the multiplication of small, project-based grants contributed to the fragmentation of UNDP programming (Burkina Faso, Chad).<sup>184</sup>

In turn, this fragmentation, combined with the absence of explicit resource-mobilization strategies and weaknesses in monitoring and external communications, reinforced fundraising difficulties in some countries (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania), as UNDP was not able to clearly communicate its positioning, priorities or results. In an already difficult funding environment and a context of great need, these funding constraints have negatively affected UNDP impact (e.g. in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania), sometimes dramatically.<sup>185</sup> For instance, in Burkina Faso, UNDP only managed to deliver \$21 million of an estimated \$220 million, resulting in the cancellation of many planned activities.<sup>186</sup>

181 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Cameroon, (2020) ICPR Cameroon, ICPE Mali; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE; UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE.

182 UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE reports that the model has inspired other West African countries, such as Togo. UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE noted that the Government made a major commitment of \$424 million over four years for the PADLFIT programme, its flagship initiative to support the implementation of the current national development plan. However, it is too early to say if and how this will be upheld.

183 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Mali.

184 UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE; UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE; UNDP Burkina Faso (2014) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad.

185 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPE Mali, (2017) ADR Cameroon, (2021) ICPE Chad; UNDP Burkina Faso (2014) DCPE; UNDP Chad (2014) DCPE.

186 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso.



Overall, the fragmentation of UNDP programming was the single most frequently identified ‘negative explanatory factor’ in evaluations with regards to UNDP impact at country level, mentioned in 14 of the 16 country programme evaluations. Fragmentation expresses itself through the multiplication of independent projects, which though technically aligned with UNDP and government priorities, are not planned or implemented as a coherent programme. Interventions thus end up being thematically and/or geographically dispersed, exhibit few connections and synergies, reduce the visibility and clarity of UNDP positioning, are less well aligned with UNDP in-house expertise and office structures, and lead to a multiplication of implementing partners as well as of management and administrative costs.<sup>187</sup> This state of affairs is driven by two key forces:

- first, the broad mandate of UNDP relative to other United Nations agencies, often influenced in this direction by UNDAFs and national development plans which themselves have broad scope and little prioritization;<sup>188</sup> and
- second (but not least), the funding modality of UNDP interventions which depend largely on the availability of non-core funding, as core resources are insufficient given the relatively low level of UNDP own resources.

Non-core funding has increasingly come in the form of earmarked funding at global and country levels, thus limiting the ability of UNDP to drive its own prioritization. Furthermore, while vertical funds (such as GEF or the Global Fund) have been an important source of funding for UNDP, their execution is conditioned to strict procedures which have often made it difficult for UNDP to flexibly integrate its programmatic offer. GEF funding has provided invaluable financial resources to advance the environmental agenda but, despite providing a more predictable, multi-year funding source, the lengthy adoption process for GEF projects has made it difficult to follow-up and build on incremental results across projects.

While the drivers of limited funding are diverse, and not least influenced by the political context, several evaluations recommended a reduction in the number of priority areas for UNDP engagement, both thematically and geographically, to focus on areas of comparative advantage.<sup>189</sup> This applied to both upstream and downstream interventions and intends to achieve a critical mass of resources and influence to affect sustainable change, as opposed to scratching the surface in a wide range of areas.

187 See UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE: “The Environment, Climate Change, Inclusive Sustainable Development cluster, for example, manages a portfolio of 29 projects through both national and direct implementation modalities (NIM/DIM). Each project has at least one coordinator, a financial administrative officer, a programme officer, a management assistant, a maintenance worker and two drivers”.

188 Ibid. “Finding 1. UNDP is active in all UNDAF areas and has not clearly defined specific areas towards which to target its contribution. This led to a certain thematic dispersal, as well as a multiplication of targets, making the programme objectives overall more difficult to reach. This lack of prioritization in the programme strategy also led to geographically scattered projects, further reducing their potential impact.”

189 Country programme evaluations containing recommendations in this regard are as follows: concentrate downstream work on selected geographic areas (Mauritania 2016, Burkina 2014 and 2020, Mali 2020, Chad 2021, Niger 2017); focus on priority thematic areas (Mali 2020, Senegal 2018); focus on areas of comparative UNDP advantage (Cameroon 2017, Mauritania 2016); focus on vulnerable groups (Cameroon 2017 and 2020).



**FINDING 24.** Both upstream and downstream interventions are relevant parts of the UNDP portfolio, but the translation of one area into the other – ensuring implementation in one direction, and scaling or replicating pilots in the other – remains a significant bottleneck across the region.

As noted above, upstream support for plans, policies, data and capacity at national or subnational levels has not usually translated into impact on the ground. This was illustrated by examples of policies and strategies remaining unadopted for years, or not being implemented due to a combination of weak State capacity, lack of resources, personnel turnover, and shifting priorities driven by changes in political leadership and/or donor priorities. On the other hand, downstream interventions frequently generated meaningful (if not always sustainable) benefits for target communities, but were rarely – or in some countries, never – subsequently scaled up or replicated by other donors.<sup>190</sup> Another common observation is that downstream interventions were often noted to lack sufficient scale to provide an adequate response to the magnitude of development challenges, as intended in project strategies.<sup>191</sup> Ultimately, evaluations across the region concluded that both up- and downstream interventions are relevant, but that they need to be better linked, and that UNDP should clearly position itself as a strategic and catalytic advisor, as opposed to a fund attempting to tackle nationwide challenges village-by-village with limited means.<sup>192</sup>

Overall, the ability of UNDP to implement interventions at a large scale (in terms of geography or numbers of beneficiaries), and/or support the scale-up of its smaller interventions, has been limited by several factors. These include: the lack of UNDP and government resources; insufficient consideration for building the capacity of State structures to own and follow-up on downstream programming; and, increasingly noted in evaluations, the absence of or insufficient attention to scaling and exit strategies.

Increasingly, IEO country and thematic evaluations (not specific to the Sahel) have established links between the quality and utility of M&E systems and UNDP performance and ability to scale up its work. Frequently the underfunding of UNDP projects (against project documents) has limited the scale of activities, often leading projects to take the form of pilots to demonstrate the results and value of an intervention model, rather than fully-fledged programmes. Project strategies often fail to make this intention explicit, however, meaning that they are implemented as regular projects. Furthermore, the rigour and level of M&E efforts have remained limited to oversight and supervision activities and hardly generate any primary data and evidence of the merit and conditions for success of an intervention.

In turn, final project evaluations are not conducted systematically, and for most part not able to generate enough depth to support demonstration of the merit and/or success of interventions. Final reports often raise the issue of lack of data and/or records as a limitation for the evaluation. The capacity of final evaluations to contribute to learning is often limited to the fact that they are usually

190 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso notes: “Overall, UNDP projects lack clear exit strategies and consolidation of results achieved to ensure the sustainability of achievements. Regarding scale-up, there is no evidence of the successful scale-up of any initiative in the current programming cycle.”

191 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Cameroon, (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPE Mali, (2021) ICPE Chad; UNDP Guinea (2017) DCPE; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE.

192 UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE: “As much as smart resources can make a strategic difference, it takes massive resources to reduce poverty. In this area, the program should therefore favor innovative and demonstrative interventions, and after implementation, document them in an educational way so that other more abundant sources of funding can seize them and scale them up.”

conducted immediately after implementation, and not often able to capture results at a time when plausible evidence of sustainability and effectiveness beyond the project duration can be ascertained. As such, evaluations provide little evidence of projects implementing strategies which explicitly aim to support the conditions for scale. This would require, at least, the production and dissemination of compelling evidence for scaling the initiatives to attract the interest of national authorities and donors.

Fundamentally, the problem of scale extends beyond UNDP. In most Sahelian countries, donors and governments together do not have sufficient funds to provide quality public services at scale, and every sector suffers from funding gaps. In the most challenging contexts, where UNDP is expected to intervene, State authority and presence are absent. Nonetheless, certain UNDP practices may improve the conditions and increase the chances to attenuate the severity of the issues, and generate opportunities to promote scale-up.

**FINDING 25. Delays frequently affected programme implementation, which, in a context of underfunding, often meant that strategies were only partially implemented. This sometimes affected partner perceptions of UNDP. While contextual challenges cannot be underestimated, evaluations also raised internal management issues as a cause for additional delays.**

Delays in the execution of projects and programmes were commonly raised in project evaluation reports, and noted both with the design, formulation, approval and launch of projects (e.g. in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and others), and at a higher level, with the sign-off of annual work plans. Evaluations suggest three sources for delays: UNDP timing, with preparation starting too late and planning timelines not aligned with government budgetary cycles; government delays in deciding its contribution to annual work plans; and limited familiarity of some national implementing partners with United Nations processes.

Analysis of evaluation reports shows three common issues causing the delays: the delayed approval of annual work plans and disbursement of funds; slow and inefficient procurement of equipment and services; and delays in the deployment of key project personnel. At project level, many evaluations noted important gaps between the formal signing and launch of project documents and the effective start of project implementation due to delayed approval of annual work plans or delays in the recruitment of project staff and technical expertise.

The final approval of annual workplans often took place well into the first half of the year (e.g., in Cameroon, Guinea and Niger).<sup>193</sup> This stalls projects and payments, while fixed-cost expenses continue to accrue, and results in a rush to deliver activities and disburse funds in the second half of the year.<sup>194</sup> Disbursement delays were noted in several countries (e.g. Burkina Faso and Niger), and attributed either to a lack of internal administrative and financial capacity within UNDP (Chad), or to UNDP partners not being sufficiently familiar with United Nations processes (Senegal).<sup>195</sup>

193 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, (2017) ADR Cameroon; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE.

194 Innovative solutions can be found: in 2017, the Niger country office decided to disburse funds on the basis of a quarterly workplan, without awaiting finalization of the final one. While this is not optimal in the long-term, it allowed projects to move past short-term bottlenecks and buy time to tackle the underlying issue.

195 UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso; UNDP Chad (2014) DCPE, (2017) DCPE; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE.

Delays can be particularly problematic in emergency settings. For example, in Mauritania, UNDP had to return 87 percent of a Central Emergency Response Fund grant due to insufficient disbursement, slowed down by internal administrative processes. Delays in fund disbursement were also found to put pressure on implementing partners, as well as the timing for implementation of annual workplans. This was noted to be a significant bottleneck in some cases, for example where rainy seasons can limit accessibility to some areas for implementation, or dry seasons create challenges for infrastructure building with a need to access water.

The third issue (slow and inefficient procurement of goods and services) was noted in several countries, including Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, purchased goods and services were sometimes not of the expected quality, due to the poor capacity of the companies awarded contracts (e.g. Chad infrastructure projects), or outright failure to deliver (e.g. Burkina Faso airport repairs). Relatively few evaluations focused on procurement as a strength and service of UNDP. Overall, while some of the noted examples are extreme, and while some administrative complexity is to be expected given the sums involved and the operational challenges of the region, the recurrence of delays and administrative burdens can significantly distract UNDP from more strategic work and hinder the effectiveness of its programming.

**FINDING 26. Joint programming has been uneven across thematic areas and there have been constraints in delivering holistic responses and new business models due to the persistent lack of integration of implementation by participating agencies.**

Building on its past role as coordinating agency of the United Nations system at country level, UNDP has engaged in different joint projects and programmes, most notably in the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.<sup>197</sup> As noted in some ICPEs, the funding available through United Nations vertical funds, in particular PBF, have been an important catalyst for United Nations joint programmes.<sup>198</sup> Joint programming has been a more prominent feature of UNDP programming in the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, incentivized by PBF, not least since the increased impetus to operationalize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

UNDP engaged in joint programming and collaboration at different levels with specific agencies across the region, in particular UNICEF (Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal), United Nations Population Fund (Chad, Guinea, Niger and Senegal), UN-Habitat (Burkina Faso, Chad and Senegal), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Cameroon and the Gambia), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Cameroon and Chad), and UN Women (Cameroon and Chad).<sup>199</sup> Other joint programme partners noted in evaluations include: UNCDF (Cameroon), International Labour Organization (Senegal), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (Senegal), United

196 UNDP Burkina Faso (2014) DCPE; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE; UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE.

197 Until 2018, UNDP hosted the resident coordinator function and thus historically has participated in the coordination of United Nations system activities. Evaluations throughout the region and period recognized UNDP efforts in this regard, be it in convening partners and government (Cameroon 2017, Mauritania 2016), coordinating the UNDAF and promoting 'delivery as one' (the Gambia 2014, Chad 2014, Niger 2017), or co-chairing donor and sector working groups (Guinea 2016 mid-term DCPE, Senegal 2018 DCPE).

198 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad.

199 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPR Cameroon, (2021) ICPE Chad, (2017) ADR Cameroon; UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2015) DCPE; UNDP the Gambia (2019) DCPE; UNDP Chad (2017) DCPE, (2014) DCPE; UNDP Niger (2017) DCPE; UNDP Burkina Faso (2014) DCPE.

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Cameroon), PBF (Chad, Niger), GEF (various), World Food Programme (Chad), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Chad), and UNAIDS (Chad and the Gambia).

Nine of the 16 country programme evaluations noted gaps in the overall level of interagency collaboration for the implementation of UNDP country programmes. Missed opportunities fell into several categories. First, UNDP struggled to foster overall coordination in some countries, partly due to the absence of partnership strategies or management prioritization (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mali).<sup>200</sup> Secondly, in some countries there was little programmatic collaboration between agencies working in similar sectoral and geographic areas, who would have benefited from sharing resources and knowledge. This was noted in particular in the area of climate change adaptation in Mauritania, Chad and Mali, and on GEWE in Burkina Faso and Mali.<sup>201</sup>

However, even where joint programmes were in place, samples of joint project evaluations noted shortcomings related to the lack of integration and synergy in the implementation of activities by participating United Nations entities, which resulted in parallel operations on the ground (e.g., Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal).<sup>202</sup> With few exceptions, similar accounts were raised, often deploring missed opportunities to generate the intended synergetic effects between the interventions of different agencies. In the worst cases, evaluations noted examples where execution between agencies became disjointed: implementing in different areas, at different times, and targeting different beneficiaries.<sup>203</sup>

Several evaluations point to a joint programming logic centred on participating agencies and their existing interventions, rather than building on identified needs to co-create an interagency intervention model. Even when coordination units were established at project level, they often struggled to maintain the cohesion of the programme due to a lack of control over the resources and activities of participating agencies.<sup>204</sup> Some evaluations recommended the flexibility and autonomy of implementing units from respective country offices, to help ensure adherence to joint projects.<sup>205</sup>

Similar observations about United Nations joint programming are echoed in UNDAF evaluations available for the countries covered.<sup>206</sup> While assessments have evolved, from reflections on joint projects to a broader vision of joint programming against UNDAF objectives, the same challenges have remained. The most recent UNDAF evaluations conducted in the ten Sahel countries (2018) highlight that joint workplans continue to compete with individual workplans, and individual agencies compete for visibility in country, noting limited cases of programmatic integration across the work of agencies.<sup>207</sup>

200 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso, ICPE Mali.

201 UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania, (2021) ICPE Chad, (2020) ICPE Mali, ICPE Burkina Faso.

202 UNDP Senegal (2018) DCPE; UNDP Guinea (2016) DCPE; UNDP IEO (2016) ADR Mauritania.

203 FAO UNICEF UNDP (2020) Final project evaluation of Renforcer la sécurité humaine dans les communes de Maga, Kousséri et Moulvoudaye dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord du Cameroun comme moyen d'atteindre les objectifs de développement durable.

204 UNDP Guinea (2016) Final UNDAF evaluation.

205 UNDP (2020) Final project evaluation of Promotion de la sécurité communautaire et de la cohésion sociale au liptako gourma; UNDP (2019) Final project evaluation of Soutenir les mécanismes de consolidation de la paix au niveau communautaire et l'inclusion des jeunes dans les zones situées à la frontière entre le Tchad et le Cameroun.

206 The sample of UNDAF evaluations available was: the Gambia (2016); Guinea (2021, 2016), Senegal (2018), Niger 2018, Mali (2018), Cameroon (2017), Nigeria (2017, 2013).

207 UNDP (2021) UNDAF evaluation Guinea, (2018) UNDAF evaluation Mali, (2018) UNDAF Midterm review the Gambia, (2017) UNDAF evaluation Cameroon.

In some countries, UNDAF evaluations present positive United Nations country team initiatives to expand coordination efforts at the municipal level, to focus and promote synergy in agencies' interventions.<sup>208</sup> While achieving the intended level of integration remained challenging, some cases built on the approach of consolidating common sub-offices,<sup>209</sup> and deploying United Nations volunteers to support coordination at municipal level.<sup>210</sup> The fragmentation of funding remains a significant challenge, however, and several UNDAF evaluations have raised the need for the United Nations system to advance towards country-level pooled funding to address this systemic issue, even though existing experience does not always demonstrate their merit.<sup>211</sup>

An integrated United Nations system response at country level remains work in progress, but overall, evaluations of joint projects and UNDAF evaluations suggest that joint programming is given greater impetus in crisis contexts, despite remaining structural challenges. They suggest that joint responses are more likely to deliver as intended when they build on participatory bottom-up needs assessment, are geographically targeted, and execution is supported by pre-existing interagency collaboration frameworks and operational arrangements.

**FINDING 27. Cross-border programming can be a significant response modality to the multidimensional challenges of border areas, and a distinct contribution of UNDP to UNISS. Despite the fact that environmental issues spread across borders, UNDP has pursued relatively little cross-border programming in this area of work.**

Cross-border programming has been emphasized in successive UNDP and United Nations system-wide strategies in the Sahel, and was reemphasized as one of the six priorities in the UNISS support plan. UNDP has been an important actor in cross-border programming, building on its universal presence and in-country operational capabilities.

UNDP cross-border programming has mostly been implemented in the area of peacebuilding, through PBF projects, and more recently in larger flagship cross-border stabilization programmes in the Lake Chad Basin (between Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria) and the Liptako-Gourma (between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger).

Cross-border programming has particular relevance, as local development challenges have demonstrated their ability to spread across borders and grow into significant factors destabilizing the region. Evaluations have found cross-border programming approaches to be a highly relevant and positive means of promoting the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach in UNDP work, especially when implemented jointly with other United Nations entities.<sup>212</sup> For example, UNDP and UNICEF engaged in a joint cross-border joint programme for community-level peace consolidation and youth inclusion along the Chad and northern Cameroon border, integrating income-generating

208 UNDP (2018) UNDAF evaluation Niger, (2021) UNDAF evaluation Guinea.

209 UNDP IEO (2020) ICPE Burkina Faso; UNDP (2021) UNDAF evaluation Guinea.

210 UNDP (2018) UNDAF Evaluation Niger.

211 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Nigeria. In the context of the COVID-19 response, a United Nations pooled fund was successfully established and found important in securing resource mobilization, but finally implementation did not differ and remained siloed at agency level.

212 UNDP IEO (2021) ICPE Chad, ICPE Nigeria.

activities, social cohesion and basic service delivery to strengthen the resilience of border villages to violent extremism.<sup>213</sup>

Many cross-border programmes illustrate coordination and efficiency challenges linked to the regional nature of the work, as offices did not consistently share knowledge or lessons learned, faced challenges in synchronizing and sequencing joint activities, and were often faced with a multiplication of administrative procedures (tenders in each country, etc.) which raised costs. An evaluation of a regional transnational European Union and ECOWAS project implemented by UNDP highlighted some positive practices at midterm, which streamlined and centralized procurement activities through a project coordination unit in one participating country to improve operational effectiveness.<sup>214</sup>

Similarly, the experience of the two cross-border stabilization programmes highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder cross-border engagement and coordination, along with a designated coordination function to support programme cohesion. Another determining factor for the coordination of cross-border initiatives is the degree of autonomy and flexibility of project implementing units in relation to their respective country offices.<sup>215</sup> Far from suggesting that cross-border work should not be pursued, this evidence suggests that guidance or standardized modalities may be needed to support future cross-border UNDP programming.

Finally, despite the fact that environmental issues spread across borders, UNDP has pursued relatively little cross-border programming in this area. The sample of evaluations reviewed only contained three projects which worked on environmental issues across borders: an initiative on border-adjacent national parks in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger; an initiative on protecting endemic herds in the Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Senegal; and an initiative on marine resource governance in the Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal. All three were evaluated in 2014, close to a decade ago. With the exception of the implementation of a regional GEF project to support the Lake Chad Basin Commission in its regional environment mandate over Lake Chad, environmental and adaptation-based programming with cross-border and regional implications has not been covered by evaluations.

213 UNDP (2019) Final project evaluation of Soutenir les mécanismes de consolidation de la paix au niveau communautaire et l'inclusion des jeunes dans les zones situées à la frontière entre le Tchad et le Cameroun.

214 UNDP (2018) Midterm evaluation of the ECOWAS/EU Small Arms Project (2015-2017).

215 UNDP (2020) Final project evaluation of Promotion de la securite communautaire et de la cohesion sociale au Liptako Gourma, (2021) Final Evaluation of Lake Chad Basin Stabilization Phase 2.

# 03

## **CHAPTER 3** **KEY TAKEAWAYS AND** **ISSUES FOR FURTHER** **CONSIDERATION**



The key takeaways discussed below are based on the findings and analysis of issues described in Chapter 2. The synthesis presents a set of issues for consideration, with the aim of supporting the UNDP response and future programme strategy in the subregion.

#### **A. Key takeaways**

**UNDP faces a challenge for its work in the Sahel - to find a balance between responding to immediate needs, while keeping a long-term development perspective to support structural transformation, in line with its mandate. This, within a context of limited funding and a fluid institutional environment. However, UNDP is considered a reliable and trusted partner of national governments in the region, building on its long-term in-country presence and the criticality of its support to respond to structural needs and crises.**

Grounded in its decades-long presence, its direct engagement with central governments, and its consistent responsiveness to changing national priorities, UNDP enjoys the trust of and proximity to national governments across the region. Stakeholders across the region recognize UNDP as a credible and technically influential agency, albeit with limited financial capacity. UNDP remains a reliable partner for countries during political and institutional turmoil, when other development partners may limit their partnerships. At the same time, political and funding space has been limited for key areas of the UNDP mandate, including its support to core government functions, despite the potential of this type of work to advance structural transformation at larger scale.

**Downstream interventions have been most relevant and effective when adopting comprehensive participatory processes involving multiple horizontal and vertical partnerships, enabling beneficiaries to direct the design, planning and implementation of interventions.**

Development requires steady, community-by-community effort. Productive and technical assets must be tailored to the local context, by validating the need, setting up viable governance and resource-sharing structures, and offering support to manage and entrench changes. Participatory processes, which enable indirect and final beneficiaries to participate in the design, planning and implementation of interventions, continue to demonstrate their importance in ensuring the relevance and sustainability of interventions.

**The small scale of interventions, coupled with recurrent operational challenges, is limiting the impact of UNDP development support in the Sahel region.**

UNDP implementation has faced multiple challenges of underfunding, high operational costs due to adverse geographies and the seasonality of access in some territories, and limited State capacity and presence in the most vulnerable intervention areas. Evaluations often emphasize the small scale and short timeframes of projects, and stress the demonstrative nature of UNDP interventions. However, internal operational challenges (delays in the approval of annual workplans, between the adoption and effective implementation of project, and in disbursement and procurement) place an additional burden on UNDP programme implementation.



In this context, and despite their general small scale, UNDP interventions have faced significant constraints to provide comprehensive support, adequate supervision and follow-up with beneficiaries to ensure the validity and overall merit of its intervention approaches.

**UNDP interventions in the Sahel have not included sufficient measures for the replication and scale-up of benefits and approaches. This is reflected in the lack of differentiation between the design of pilots and regular projects, and weaknesses in generating conclusive evidence on the performance of intervention models.**

Traditional scale-up pathways have been difficult to exploit due to the fluid institutional, political and fiscal constraints that affect many countries in the region. This means that there are better prospects for the replication and scaling of UNDP interventions by larger development partners, though there is scope for UNDP to strengthen measures to demonstrate the added value of interventions and promote their scale-up and replication. M&E should be complemented with additional evidence-generating activities to enhance the potential for learning and adaptation during implementation.

## **B. Issues for further consideration**

### **Good governance, stabilization and peacebuilding**

UNDP holds a unique value proposition: given its broad mandate and ability to work at the intersection of key conflict drivers (governance, poverty, inclusion, climate change, conflict); its long history of global and regional involvement in conflict prevention (e.g. stabilization, security sector reforms, disarmament interventions); and its ability to convene actors across the board (governments, political parties, civil society, religious leaders, and other agencies and donors).

The fragmentation of UNDP interventions into projects and thematically-focused interventions, while not always in UNDP control, represents a constraint to unlocking its potential contribution to a holistic response to conflict and peacebuilding challenges. The need for integrated approaches to build peace and address the multidimensional challenges in the Sahel is self-evident. This requires more concerted efforts from UNDP to ensure that conflict-sensitivity is better mainstreamed into all of its programmes to enable the development of multiple pathways to sustain peace and conflict prevention.

### **Climate change adaptation**

Given its prominence and past work in the region, the opportunities for UNDP to expand climate change adaptation support in the Sahel are both profound and critical. Sahel countries are highly vulnerable to extreme climate events. Amidst a rapidly expanding population, with the consequent pressures on arable land and forests, increasingly frequent and severe droughts and flash floods are spurring human migration and exacerbating existing problems of poverty and political tension.

UNDP support to address environmental challenges has been important in raising awareness and improving regulation. With evaluations highlighting the lack of sustained engagement of national stakeholders on this critical issue, UNDP has space to be more proactive in its advocacy efforts to sustain interest and entrench new, more sustainable policies and practices. In the meantime, there

is an urgency to ensure that climate change adaptation and risks are integrated into all aspects of UNDP interventions to support the adaptive, absorptive and transformative capacity of communities and ensure climate resilience.

### Sustainable livelihood solutions

A significant proportion of UNDP interventions has been dedicated to enabling improved livelihood options across its thematic portfolio. Livelihood options are integrated into the entire UNDP programmatic offer in the Sahel, cutting across the ten countries, their different contexts, and its thematic offer (inclusive growth, peacebuilding and stabilization, and environment).

Evidence from evaluations across those themes have highlighted the relevance of this approach to improving access to resources and livelihood options, key to addressing issues of economic exclusion that have underpinned significant development risks and challenges in the region. Enhancing livelihood options, in particular in conflict settings where State presence is limited and/or at risk, requires more long-term and sustained support and due regard to the vulnerabilities of target groups, to ensure that contributions to social cohesion objectives are sustainable and effective. In addition, a focus on supplying solutions without ensuring and/or supporting a conducive environment, often presents risks to the success of interventions.

### Access to Finance

While UNDP support for access to finance has shown limited measures for de-risking access to beneficiaries and loan delivery for finance institutions, it is still worth further consideration by UNDP, especially in the new environment of integrative financing and COVID-19 finance recovery. There is a need for strategic planning to differently and more effectively support the Sahel region on these matters and address the tension between environmental and economic considerations. This includes the development of incentives and innovative financing solutions that mutually reinforce livelihoods, conservation and access to renewable energy and other sustainable means of economic growth.

### Access to renewable energy

The proposed UNDP Sahel Offer, and renewed focus on access to renewable energy, constitutes a timely and coherent strategic direction to enable the development of productive capacity while addressing issues of conservation and natural resource management, which have provided fertile ground for the expansion of community-level conflicts in the region. The scale-up of this work faces many technical challenges and supply risks, not least given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the domestic resource mobilization capacity of both the private and public sectors.

In this regard, the prioritization of UNDP capabilities, prompted by the recognition and elevation of this area of work as a signature solution of its Strategic Plan and Sahel Offer, is an important development. Given the ongoing financing and global value chain challenges that the world is currently facing, UNDP experience in the development of locally-based bioenergy and nature-based solutions presents an important opportunity that should not be overlooked, and for which UNDP can play a role to stimulate replication, innovation and scale-up.

### Cross-border programming

The deteriorating situation in Sahel countries over the last decade has highlighted both the cascading vulnerabilities of the region and the cross-border nature of its development challenges. This is recognised in UNSPS, which places renewed emphasis on joint and cross-border programming. Because of its experience, broad mandate and in-country operational capacity, UNDP is uniquely positioned to exercise leadership and take up this call.

In this regard, the regional stabilization efforts put in place by UNDP in Lake Chad and Liptako-Gourma deserve further consideration as blueprints for enhancing and expanding such efforts to other border areas, including those not affected by conflict where such interventions have not been developed. Cross-border interventions should also be considered to tackle environmental and natural resource management issues which, along with conflict and security issues, have been important drivers of displacement and cascading vulnerabilities.

### Learning and adaptation

Evaluations all highlight the challenges of operating in the Sahel due to the geography and climate, fast-changing context and multidimensional and cascading vulnerabilities. In such a context, all interventions, no matter their size and reach, should be considered as complex, requiring constant monitoring and assessment of the validity of the assumptions and conditions for success to inform the adaptation of strategies. However, evaluation coverage in the ten Sahel countries covered in this review has been uneven, in relation to the thematic coverage, areas of expenditure, and types of evaluation. While the opportunities to conduct evaluation and other data collection outside of mandated exercises may be limited by funding, significant efficiency and synergy could be built by ensuring greater alignment and complementarities in M&E activities in the region, to accelerate learning about what works and under which circumstances.

A subregional monitoring, evaluation and learning plan should be considered, building on country-level evaluation plans, with a view to fill evidence gaps and leverage learning and experiences across the ten countries to accelerate and support adaptive decision-making. This could enable the diversification of approaches and methods, and improve the timeliness of evaluations. It would also help to provide a more conclusive picture of the performance of interventions, as final project evaluations often stress the need to further consolidate project results, which would require evaluative follow-up to improve understanding of the sustainability of interventions. Periodically testing the validity of underlying assumptions and risks of its intervention models would be an important source of adaptation, and potentially for UNDP thought leadership in the region.







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