

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION UZBEKISTAN



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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT HUMAN COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP efficiency relevance COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP sustainability HUMAN DEVELOPMENT relevance HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION Efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP effectiveness relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION Efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP effectiveness COORDINATION Efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP effectiveness

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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: Uzbekistan

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Peru

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACA Anti-Corruption Agency

ACPIS Anti-Corruption for Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

B&HR Business and Human RightsBIOFIN Biodiversity Finance Initiative

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019

CPD Country programme document

CSO Civil society organization

DIM Direct Implementation Modality

E-SUD Electronic Justice System

EU European Union

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GBV Gender-based violence
GDP Gross domestic product

GEWE Gender equality and women's empowerment

ICPE Independent Country Programme Evaluation

IEA International Energy Agency
IEO Independent Evaluation Office
IFI International financial institution

INFF Integrated National Financing Framework

IPV Intimate Partner ViolenceIsDB Islamic Development Bank

LNOB Leave no one behind

MHEWS Multi-hazard early warning systems

N-MPI National Multidimensional Poverty Index

NAP National Adaptation Plan

NDC Nationally Determined Contribution

NGO Non-governmental organization
NIM National Implementation Modality

OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PWD Persons with disabilities

RBEC Regional Bureau for Europe and Central Asia

ROAR Results-Oriented Annual Report

SDG Sustainable Development GoalSOPs Standard operating procedures

STEM Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

ToC Theory of change

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNEG United Nations Evaluation GroupUNFPA United Nations Population FundUNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UNSDCF United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

UPR Universal Periodic Review

USAID United States Agency for International Development

WHO World Health Organization
WTO World Trade Organization

Evaluation Brief: Uzbekistan

Country context

Uzbekistan is a landlocked lower middle-income country in Central Asia, with a population of over 37 million people, half in urban areas. In 2017, Uzbekistan embarked on an ambitious reform agenda to modernize its economy, governance structures and social systems, with the aspiration of achieving upper middle-income status by 2030. These reforms included the transition to a market-based economy, increased transparency in governance and investments in human capital and sustainable development.

Despite steady economic growth, the benefits were not equally distributed and regional disparities persist. Climate change poses significant challenges, given the country's reliance on water resources originating from neighbouring countries. Gender disparities remain a concern, particularly in employment and leadership roles, although recent legislative progress has been made.

UNDP in Uzbekistan and country programme under review

The UNDP Country Programme (2021-2025) aligns with Uzbekistan's national development priorities and is structured around four key priority areas:

- 1. **Strengthening Governance and Institutions** Focused on enhancing transparency, accountability and public service delivery.
- 2. **Addressing Poverty and Inequality** Supporting inclusive and sustainable development, particularly for women, youth and rural populations.
- 3. **Promoting Environmentally Sustainable and Inclusive Growth** Encouraging sustainable natural resource management and reducing environmental impact.
- 4. **Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Resilience** Strengthening multi-hazard early warning systems and supporting adaptation to climate change.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has made significant contributions to Uzbekistan's reform agenda, particularly in governance, economic development, environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction. However, challenges remain in integrating programme outcomes, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and ensuring long-term sustainability. The next programme cycle presents an opportunity to build on these achievements while addressing remaining gaps to support Uzbekistan's transition to a just, green and resilient economy.

Findings and Conclusions

Strengthening Governance and Institutions: UNDP played a vital role in advancing governance reforms in Uzbekistan by strengthening anti-corruption frameworks, improving access to justice, and promoting digitalization in public services. The country has made progress in judicial transparency, as reflected in its improved ranking in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index. However, full institutionalization of anti-corruption measures remains a challenge, particularly in enforcing asset declaration systems and enhancing the efficiency of the Electronic Justice System. Public administration reforms progressed but require further efforts to ensure decentralization and more effective public service delivery.

Addressing Poverty and Inequality: Through initiatives such as the Integrated National Financing Framework and support for financing aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Uzbekistan's first SDG bond issuance, UNDP has made strides in poverty reduction. Youth employment and digital literacy programmes have demonstrated positive outcomes, though they would need to be scaled to achieve systemic impact. Participatory budgeting in Surkhandarya successfully promoted citizen engagement, but broader institutionalization of social protection mechanisms is needed to ensure long-term sustainability and expanded outreach to marginalized communities.

Promoting Environmentally Sustainable and Inclusive Growth: UNDP supported the development of strategic frameworks such as the Green Growth Strategic Framework and the National Adaptation Plan. Progress in renewable energy and climate adaptation remains slow due to limited investment and challenges in energy tariff reforms. Sustainable management of natural resources improved, but environmental policies need to be better integrated into national economic planning. The expansion of biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions had a positive impact, though further capacity-building is necessary for long-term implementation.

Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Resilience: UNDP efforts in disaster preparedness and MHEWS helped at-risk communities build resilience against climate change-induced disasters. However, sustainable financial integration into national planning remains a challenge, particularly in the Aral Sea region. While early warning systems improved risk management, expanding their coverage through enhanced institutional and technical capacity remains a priority.

Cross-Cutting Issues: UNDP has successfully integrated Leave No One Behind principles, ensuring that marginalized groups such as people with disabilities and Afghan beneficiaries benefit from its interventions. Gender equality has been advanced through policy support, digital and science, technology, engineering and mathematics education for women, and legal protections against intimate partner violence, though barriers to transformative gender outcomes persist. Digital transformation supported governance and economic inclusion but must be expanded to address rural disparities. While civil society engagement increased, participatory governance processes require further institutionalization. Addressing data gaps in environmental and social policies is critical for strengthening evidence-based decision-making and ensuring sustainable development.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. UNDP should maintain the strategic focus of its interventions and continue its efforts to strengthen governance across all outcomes and ensure political support for sustainability.

Recommendation 2. UNDP should accelerate its efforts to promote integrated, cross-sectoral solutions for enhanced outcomes aligned with UNDP global strategies.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should further explore and capitalize on funding opportunities within the next CPD cycle by fostering joint programmes with key United Nations agencies through the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund. This collaborative approach will help mobilize additional resources, amplify collective impact and advance the achievement of the SDGs in Uzbekistan.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should enhance civil society engagement and the integration of inclusion issues in the design of interventions.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should strengthen efforts to advance gender equity and women's empowerment (GEWE) and leave no one behind (LNOB) through comprehensive approaches by building the capacity of a critical mass of national gender experts across all outcome-related sectors. Additionally, it should support research and studies that effectively inform the design of future interventions and enhance the GEWE and LNOB results framework.

Recommendation 6. UNDP should implement a unified monitoring and evaluation system across country programme document outcomes and enhance efforts to support the Government of Uzbekistan to generate robust policy evidence on gender and vulnerability.

Recommendation 7. To address the urgent and emerging needs of Uzbekistan in the subsequent programme UNDP can strategically position itself as a leader by leveraging its comparative advantages in three interconnected areas: water management, environmental justice and business and human rights.

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation as well as the methodology applied. It also sets out the development context and the UNDP programme in Uzbekistan.

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to critically assess UNDP contributions to national development priorities and results. This was the third country programme evaluation conducted by the IEO in Uzbekistan.¹

ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions in the UNDP evaluation policy.² Within the ICPE framework, the evaluation team assessed UNDP contributions and the effectiveness of UNDP country office strategy towards achieving the development results articulated in its Country Programme Document (CPD). The CPD and its goals were derived from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the programmatic framework for United Nations agencies operating in the country. The objectives of this ICPE were to:

- Support the development of the next Uzbekistan UNDP country programme by identifying best practices, results and key lessons learned from the current cycle;
- Strengthen the accountability of the UNDP to national and international stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board; and
- Contribute to knowledge generation, organizational learning and decision-making within the UNDP.

This ICPE was carried out in 2024 and covered the period from 2021 to the end of 2024, i.e. the first three and a half years of the current country programme cycle (2021-2025). The ICPE covered UNDP activities in the country and interventions funded by all funding sources, including UNDP resources and donor and government funds. The ICPE also covered non-project activities, such as coordination and advocacy, which were important in supporting the political and social agenda of the country.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used outcomes and outputs presented by the country programme for the period 2021-2025 as a framework against which to analyse achievements. It looked at each of the planned outcomes, their relative outputs and their respective links to the strategic objectives of the programme.

To better understand UNDP performance and the sustainability of results in the country, the ICPE recognized the need to integrate external factors that potentially influenced the country programme, either positively or negatively, such as international economic developments and the global political situation. The ICPE also assessed the country office's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to national development needs and priorities. More specifically, the evaluation sought to answer the four evaluation questions presented in Box 1.

¹ IEO conducted an Assessment of Development Results in 2009: https://erc.undp.org/evaluations/detail/4151?tab=documents; and an ICPE in 2019: https://erc.undp.org/evaluations/detail/12564?tab=documents

See UNDP IEO 'UNDP Evaluation Policy.' Available at: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml

The evaluation methodology adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards.³ In line with the UNDP gender mainstreaming strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the formulation of the country programme and its operations, as well as the results achieved. Gender marker data were used to analyse the level of expected contribution to gender equality in programme design. Gender-related results were assessed using the UNDP Gender Results Effectiveness Scale.⁴

The following methods were used to respond to the evaluation questions:

- Document Review: Analysis of the full portfolio of projects and programme and other relevant documents, including decentralized evaluations, Result-Oriented Annual Reports (ROARs) and audits where available. See Annex 3 for a complete list of documents.
- Pre-mission questionnaire with the country office: Captured the performance and results of the programme, as well as major cross-cutting themes, such as gender, partnerships and the design and implementation-related issues of the country programme.
- Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions: Included 108 key informants (in-person and remote), including individuals from vulnerable communities.⁵ See Annex 4 for a complete list of key informants interviewed.
- Site visits and direct observations: carried out in the capital city of Tashkent, the Tashkent region of Akhangaran, the Ferghana and Surkhandarya valleys, the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Khorezm region. Annex 4 provides a complete list of sites visited.

BOX 1. Evaluation questions

1. To what extent has the UNDP country programme strategically addressed key national development priorities and the needs of its main stakeholders, including those at risk of being left behind?

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2. To what extent was UNDP able to adapt its positioning and programmatic response to shifts in context and other changes in the operating environment, leveraging comparative strengths?

.....

- 3. To what extent were UNDP approaches and interventions successful in achieving the intended objectives of the country programme and contributing to broader, longer-term national development goals?
- 4. To what extent did internal and external factors influence UNDP ability to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

The ICPE used the IEO rating system to assess the performance of the country programme against the criteria of Relevance, Coherence, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Sustainability. Evidence was triangulated against a set of parameters for each criterion, and a four-point rating scale was used for the assessment (see Annex 8).

See UNEG website: http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914.

The IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative, gender blind, gender targeted, gender responsive and gender transformative.

⁵ In this report, the expression 'vulnerable communities' is an umbrella term to refer to, *inter alia*, women, youth, marginalized communities living in remote areas, Afghan nationals and people with disabilities.

The ICPE underwent a rigorous quality assurance process, first with internal peer review at the IEO and external reviewers. Thereafter, the report was submitted to the country office and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and Central Asia (RBEC) and, finally, to the Government and other partners in the country for review. This process concluded with a presentation, bringing together the main stakeholders of the programme to discuss the results and recommendations in this report.

1.3 Country context

Uzbekistan is a double land-locked⁶ lower-middle income country located in Central Asia. With over 37 million inhabitants, half of whom are in urban areas, and 2.1 percent annual population growth.⁷ Uzbekistan aspires to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030. A former Soviet republic, Uzbekistan was characterized by a centralized economy until the launch of an ambitious nationwide reform programme in 2017. The programme set out to bring profound changes in the country, strengthening the governance system and increasing its transparency, to transition to a market-based economy and ensure a just, equal and resilient society.⁸

In early 2017, Uzbekistan embarked on ambitious reforms affecting all social, political and economic aspects of the country. This government vision to transform Uzbekistan by 2030 enjoyed popular support. Structural reforms and trade liberalization encouraged increased financial flows, including from international financial institutions (IFIs). With 57 percent of the population under 30, Uzbekistan had the potential to strengthen the economy through the creation of employment opportunities, fostering economic initiative and innovation, and enhancing future work capabilities and digital skills. With the unemployment rate in Uzbekistan projected to reach 7 percent by the end of 2024, the Government implemented key policies to address unemployment, within a comprehensive strategy to reduce unemployment. These included a 2024 Presidential Resolution, and measures to support youth and business development, create new jobs and increase incomes outlined in the State Programme for Implementation of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, with further actions planned for 2025.

In January 2022, the New Uzbekistan Development Strategy 2022–2026 was adopted, a five year plan to advance the economy to catch up with upper-middle income countries and adapt to global economic changes. The Strategy focused on seven priority areas, with key goals to promote faster and more inclusive growth by reducing state control and empowering the private sector. The Strategy also emphasized the transition to a greener, more equitable economy through job creation, improving social inclusion and investing in human capital and sustainable resources. However, global geopolitical uncertainties and regional tensions, such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, posed substantial challenges to the swift implementation of the reform agenda.

Despite these objectives, much of the economy remained under the control of central State authorities. Significant economic transformation remained in initial phases, though in recent years the country experienced consistent economic growth, reducing the poverty rate from 24 percent in 2000 to 11 percent

⁶ Uzbekistan is surrounded by landlocked countries in Central Asia.

Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Infographic on the 'Demographic situation in the Republic of Uzbekistan.' June 2024: https://stat.uz/en/2020-11-09-06-11-08/infographics. World Bank. Data for Uzbekistan. Last accessed July 2024: https://data.worldbank.org/country/uzbekistan

⁸ Izvorski at al., Assessing Uzbekistan's Transition. Country Economic Memorandum, World Bank.

⁹ Trading Economics, Uzbekistan Unemployment Rate. Accessed January 2025: https://tradingeconomics.com/uzbekistan/unemployment-rate

President's Resolution No. PP-7 dated January 9, 2024, titled "About the Programme of Creation of New Workplaces and Assistance of Employment of the Population in 2024." President of Uzbekistan, Proposals on Employment and Entrepreneurship Discussed. Accessed January 2025: https://president.uz/en/lists/view/6960?utm_source=chatgpt.com

in 2023.¹¹ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Uzbekistan reached US\$101.6 billion in 2023, \$2,788.9 per capita, and life expectancy reached 71.7 years, reflecting steady economic growth and social development.¹² However, the benefits of economic growth were not equally distributed, and growth was less effective at decreasing poverty and structural disparities, creating high-quality jobs and increasing wages. Between 2022 and 2023, the wealthiest 10 percent of the population gained three times more than the poorest 10 percent.¹³ Regional disparities also influenced the country's economic performance. While the secondary and tertiary sectors were primarily responsible for GDP, growth was driven by the Tashkent region, which alone accounted for around 30 percent of GDP, followed by Navoi (8.5 percent) and Samarkand (6.5 percent) in the west, and Ferghana (6 percent) and Adjian (5.8 percent) in the east.¹⁴

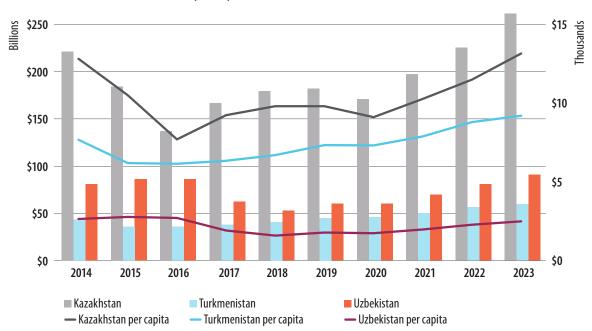


FIGURE 1. Evolution of GDP and GDP per capita 2014-2023 (\$)

Source: World Bank data.

The Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy, approved by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in September 2023, outlines the country's development goals for the next decade. The Strategy sets 100 goals across five key areas, including sustainable economic growth, the rule of law, the environment, and building a just and peaceful State. Goal 83 focuses on expanding the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media, aiming to position Uzbekistan as a regional hub for civil society development. This includes tripling the number of social partnership projects and significantly increasing non-governmental organization (NGO) participation in government programmes.¹⁵

¹¹ IMF. 'Uzbekistan: Staff Concluding Statement of the 2024 Article IV Mission'. May 14, 2024. Last accessed: 18 August 2024. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/05/14/mcs-uzbekistan-staff-concluding-statement-of-the-2024-article-iv-mission.

¹² Source: World Bank Uzbekistan, available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/overview, last visited on 27.01.2024.

David, Knight, Obert Pimhidzai, Ikuko Ouchi, 'Charting Uzbekistan's path to poverty reduction: insights from international comparisons', World Bank Blogs, 2024, May 09. Last accessed: 30 July 2024. Available at: <a href="https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/charting-uzbekistan-s-path-to-poverty-reduction-insights-from-i

Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Infographics on 'Development of the Service Sector,' and 'Production of GDP of the Republic of Uzbekistan for January-June 2024.' https://stat.uz/en/2020-11-09-06-11-08/infographics

Government of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan - 2030 Strategy. https://gov.uz/en/pages/2030_strategy/

Accountable, transparent, modern and inclusive governance and rule of law institutions are essential for Uzbekistan's development vision. Guided by an ambitious Government, the nation implemented extensive reforms, spanning anti-corruption measures, business climate enhancements, judicial reforms, security service improvements, labour conditions, administrative efficiency, human rights and good governance. Reforms targeted diverse sectors, with a focus on improving public administration, ensuring quality public services and information access, and overhauling the judiciary.

Central to these reforms was a comprehensive anti-corruption agenda bolstered by strong laws and plans, including the introduction of the Anti-Corruption Law, and key strategies on the Concept of Administrative Reform and the Action Strategy for 2017-2021. Challenges persisted in translating reforms into concrete outcomes, particularly in establishing an effective anti-corruption system. This system aimed to nurture capable, independent state institutions, comprehensive anti-corruption programmes, active civil society engagement and an anti-corruption culture.

The adoption of the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy in 2020 highlighted the country's commitment to digital transformation. Uzbekistan advanced digital governance, including digitizing services, streamlining processes, enhancing digital connectivity and promoting the technology sector. Significant investments were made to bring public services closer to the population. The Government committed to increasing the efficiency, scope and quality of services, addressing challenges such as platform non-interoperability, poor data connectivity and low digital literacy.

Substantial urban-rural and regional disparities in basic living conditions remained in Uzbekistan. Access to water and sanitation services has progressively expanded, but regional disparities persist. In 2024, data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated that only 71 percent of the rural population had access to safe drinking water, compared to 89 percent in urban areas. Only 32 percent of domestic wastewater underwent safe treatment, with efforts to enhance wastewater management ongoing. Climate-related factors, including droughts and floods, introduced complexities in service delivery, underscoring the need for resilient water infrastructure and adaptive management strategies to ensure sustainable access across all regions.¹⁶

Before 2018, under the State-controlled production system, the agricultural sector contributed about a third of GDP; predominantly focused on producing and exporting raw cotton, and two crops, cotton and wheat, accounted for 75 percent of water use in Uzbekistan.¹⁷ In 2020, Uzbekistan launched the National Agriculture Development Strategy 2020-2030 to enhance food security, farm incomes, job creation and resource use. Since then, the growing liberalization and upskilling of the cotton sector, orientated towards the production of higher value products, has contributed to modernization of the sector and the diversification of the economy. Agriculture, forestry and fishing currently account for 18 percent of GDP, and almost two-thirds of the total land area is devoted to agricultural production.¹⁸ Agricultural diversification offered better earnings, but most jobs remained informal, affecting job security, especially for women. Despite efforts to eradicate forced and child labour in cotton production, more support is needed for decent work and formal employment.

¹⁶ United Nations Water. 'Uzbekistan joins UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health', January 2024.

⁷ Izvorski at al., Assessing Uzbekistan's Transition. Country Economic Memorandum, World Bank.

Statistics Agency Uzbekistan. Infographics on 'Production of GDP of the Republic of Uzbekistan for January-June 2024.' https://stat.uz/en/2020-11-09-06-11-08/infographics

Uzbekistan's subsoil is rich in oil, gas, coal and uranium, ranking 11th in the world for mining and 14th for reserves of natural gas. However, as one of the most energy intensive economies, with inefficient usage, depleting gas production and heavy reliance on imported fossil fuels, net imports grew over the years. Moreover, the extensive use of subsidies in the energy sector has reduced incentives to improve energy efficiency and explore opportunities to produce energy with a lower environmental impact. Since 2023, Uzbekistan has reformed energy tariffs with the aim of aligning energy prices with actual costs by 2026, to enable full cost recovery, with direct subsidies to vulnerable households.

Uzbekistan has diverse natural ecosystems with rich flora and fauna, including vast plains of deserts, mountain steppes, alpine meadows, Tugai and dry forests and lakes.²² 70 percent of Uzbekistan is arid and subject to degraded pastures and frequent dust storms. The country is vulnerable to climate change, particularly due to its heavy reliance on water resources that originate in neighbouring countries, with regional tensions over upstream water withdrawals. This dependency, combined with the significant role of natural resource management in GDP, exacerbates the country's vulnerabilities. Given that the highest levels of water are used in agriculture, the Government has focused on reforming the energy and environmental sectors. The Biofinance Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) predicts that the Uzbek economy could shrink by 10 percent by 2050 if climate-related vulnerabilities are not sufficiently addressed, making adaptation strategies an important area of development.²³ The country ranks 72 in the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, suggesting that the country is well positioned to adapt to climate change-related challenges.²⁴ Despite important steps forward, insufficient data has hindered informed policymaking and sector investment.

Since 2020, Uzbekistan has implemented extensive reforms aimed at achieving gender equality. This includes the adoption of 25 legislative acts and the establishment of the Commission on Gender Equality and the Committee on Women and Gender Equality in the Senate.²⁵ Women's representation in Parliament increased significantly, reaching United Nations recommended levels of women's participation of almost 32 percent, placing Uzbekistan 37th out of 190 parliaments in the world. The proportion of women in management rose to 27 percent, in political parties to 44 percent, in higher education to 40 percent and in entrepreneurship to 35 percent. At present, women's representation in Parliament is the highest in Central Asia and above the global average. After a long campaign by women's rights activists, human rights defenders and the international community, including the United Nations, Uzbekistan criminalized IPV in April 2023, including economic and psychological violence, and expanded protection for women and children in criminal and administrative codes and established legal accountability for sexual violence and harassment. Socioeconomic initiatives were launched to support women, including the introduction of the "Women's Book" system, the allocation of substantial State funds and programmes, for example, the reimbursement of tuition fees and an increase in grants for higher education for vulnerable young women. In 2023 alone, women's entrepreneurship received nearly \$340 million in loans for over 225,000 projects, while around 40,000 women benefited from subsidies totalling nearly \$14 million.²⁶ However, challenges

¹⁹ International Energy Agency (IEA) (2020) Uzbekistan energy profile: https://www.iea.org/reports/uzbekistan-energy-profile

World Bank (2023) Uzbekistan Country Climate and Development Report. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099111423124532881/pdf/P1790680f452f10ba0a34c06922a1df0003.pdf

The IEA estimates that State subsidies for oil, gas and electricity amounted to a third of GDP in 2022. IEA (2022) Energy subsidies, Tracking the impact of fossil-fuel subsidies: https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-subsidies

²² BIOFIN: Uzbekistan.

²³ Ibid

Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index - Uzbekistan. Accessed August 2024: https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/country/uzbekistan#:~:text=The%20 low%20vulnerability%20score%20and,the%2097th%20most%20ready%20country

²⁵ Republic of Uzbekistan (2021) Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030. https://www.legislation.uzbekistan.gov/strategy-for-gender-equality-2030

²⁶ Government of Uzbekistan (2023) Resolution of the President of Uzbekistan of December 21, 2023 No. PP-401: https://lex.uz/uz/docs/.

persist, including gender-based violence (GBV), labour market segregation, property ownership disparities and traditional gender roles. World Bank data show that, despite some progress, gender gaps, GBV and discriminatory social norms persist.

In 2023, notable advancements were made towards resolving statelessness, with 4,993 individuals (of 27,389 stateless persons) gaining citizenship. However, Uzbekistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol: key international treaties that govern the rights and services provided to refugees around the world. The Government is drafting the country's first asylum law, an essential step towards creating a national asylum system aligned with international refugee protection standards. In 2023, the country received the fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Uzbekistan's report to the UPR showcased legislative improvements, but other nations and NGOs expressed concerns regarding freedom of expression and the treatment of human rights defenders and people living with HIV. The UPR outcomes were formally adopted in March 2024, after Uzbekistan presented its 6th periodic report to the Committee against Torture in December 2023. Uzbekistan declared five human rights commitments at the Human Rights 75 High-Level Event, covering: youth rights, women's rights, the prevention of torture, human rights education, and a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (B&HR).

Figure 2 presents a summary of key events in Uzbekistan across relevant sectors that potentially influenced the outcome areas where UNDP contributed.

Outcome 1 Outcome 2 Outcome 3 Outcome 4 Legend Overall (country/regional) **Obod Qishlog (Prosperous** Women's Economic **Empowerment Program (Mar)** Village) Program (Apr) Implementation of Green Space Aral Sea restoration **Programme and Water for** project launched (Jun) Sustainable Development (Sep) Law on the Protection of **Establishment of Vocational Training Centers in Rural** Human Rights (Jul) Areas (Oct) Law on Transparency and **Expansion of Green Space Inclusive Growth and Economic Public Participation (Jul)** Opportunity Act (Oct) Programme (May) 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 Legislative First Legislative Regional **Judicial** and COVID-19 Development elections (Dec) elections Legislative Reforms (Oct) case registered Fund Initiative (Dec) (Mar) (Oct) Introduction of Presidential e-governance system (Oct) elections (Oct) **Establishment of** Anti-corruption Agency (Oct)

Source: Based on publicly available information.

FIGURE 2. ICPE Uzbekistan - Timeline of events 2019-2024

1.4 UNDP in Uzbekistan and the country programme under review

The UNDP programme in Uzbekistan, under the 2021-2025 CPD, was structured around three priority areas. Strengthening Governance and Institutions (Outcome 1) aimed to reinvigorate governance systems and public institutions and promote civic engagement. The projects under this outcome were designed to enhance the transparency, accountability and rule of law of governing systems; contribute to more gender-responsive policies and institutions; expand civic participation; and ensure public service delivery and improve social cohesion. Under this CPD cycle, 46 percent of the funds were allocated to this area.

Addressing Poverty and Inequality (Outcomes 2 and 3) spanned the social and economic sectors to foster inclusive and sustainable development with special attention to women, youth and rural populations. The projects under these two outcomes aimed to promote innovative strategies to reduce poverty and inequalities; foster policy coherence and inclusive and sustainable development financing; and support resilient and inclusive growth. Under this CPD cycle, 17 percent of the funds were allocated to this area.

Promoting Environmentally Sustainable and Inclusive Growth (Outcome 4) aimed to encourage the sustainable use of natural resources and limit the negative impact of economic activities on the environment. The projects under this area aimed to create policies that foster economic growth and reduce carbon emissions; and reduce the environmental impact of unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Under this CPD cycle, 35 percent of the funds were allocated to this area. The remaining budget (3 percent) was allocated to regional and global projects across the three priority areas.

At the time of this review, the UNDP available budget amounted to \$112 million, representing 92 percent of expected resources under the CPD target and a significant proportion of the total resources available to United Nations agencies operating in Uzbekistan in 2021-2023.²⁷ The UNDP execution rate under the 2021-2025 CPD cycle was 73 percent.²⁸

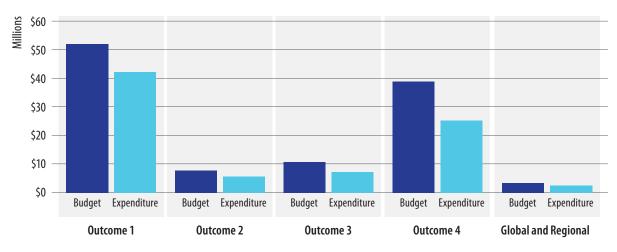


FIGURE 3. Total budget and expenditure by outcome (US\$ million) 2021-2024

Source: Atlas project data, as of 22nd July 2024

The provisional assessment is based on the financial figures provided by the UNDP country office in Uzbekistan, including the budget for 2024, against the financial figures published in the Uzbekistan United Nations Country Results Reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023 (the 2024 Report had not been produced at the time of writing). The total resources available to United Nations agencies operating in Uzbekistan amounted to \$63.8 million in 2021, \$65.5 million in 2022 and \$70.9 million in 2023. The United Nations Country Results Reports on Uzbekistan are available at: https://uzbekistan.un.org/en/resources/publications

²⁸ UNDP ATLAS extraction, 19 July 2024.

In 2019, the IEO conducted an evaluation of the CPD with seven recommendations for the country office. Table 1 presents these recommendations, along with the country office's responses and progress on their implementation.

TABLE 1. Overview of ICPE 2019 recommendations and related findings

#	2019 Recommendation	Management response	Evaluation findings
1	UNDP should consolidate the portfolio and develop a strong theory of change (ToC) to guide its strategic focus, especially on	The country office indicated that workshops on the ToC and results-based management were already underway.	A coherent and robust ToC is currently lacking in the country programme, with unclear links between inputs, activities and outcomes.
	government reforms.		The 2021-2025 CPD visual ToC was difficult to follow and the UNSDCF ToC did not fully address the need for a programme-specific ToC.
2	UNDP should strengthen its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to better reflect the theory of change and improve outcome-level analysis.	The country office initiated regional training for the M&E focal point.	The recommendation was partially implemented.
			The country office's current technical and human capacities are still insufficient to match the scale and scope of the implementation.
3	UNDP should continue to support justice sector reforms by scaling up successful models, like the Electronic Justice System (E-SUD) civic court system, across the entire court system.	The country office committed to maintain its focus on justice sector reform, including judicial integrity and rule of law.	The country office was implementing this recommendation.
			The country office supported the strengthening of the legal and institutional frameworks for free legal aid and people-centred justice services and supported the National Human Rights Institution (Ombudsperson's Office) and justice system actors.
4	UNDP should capitalize on the government's momentum in human rights reforms, particularly on the rights of vulnerable groups.	The country office pledged to enhance support for operationalizing human rights commitments, focusing on women and persons with disabilities.	The country office made significant progress in strengthening legal frameworks and developing the capacities of National Human Rights Institutions and the justice system. • Progress was aligned with international human rights and rule
	IMPD I II		of law standards.
5	UNDP should streamline its public administration reform efforts to areas of comparative advantage without diluting its impact.	Management reassessed its public administration portfolio to ensure a more integrated and focused approach.	In the period under review, the country office launched a 5-year multi-million dollar European Union (EU)-funded project on public services delivery as a cornerstone of Outcome 2.

#	2019 Recommendation	Management response	Evaluation findings
6	UNDP should further engage in environmental sustainability and risk reduction and align with government priorities.	UNDP expanded its work in the Aral Sea region and beyond, with significant achievements noted in climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation and disaster risk reduction.	The country office extensively enlarged the scope and scale of its work in these sectors, supporting the strategic policies of the Government of Uzbekistan. Progress included the • operationalization of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the Aral Sea region, • development of the Green Growth Strategic Framework, • establishment of a platform for Regional Dialogue on climate resilience.
7	UNDP should implement a long-term resource mobilization strategy to diversify its funding base.	Management committed to developing a robust value proposition as part of the new CPD and partnerships plan.	The country office successfully adjusted its structure to accommodate the expanded programme portfolio and increased resource mobilization efforts, from \$16 million in 2019 to \$27 million in 2023.

This chapter presents an assessment of the UNDP strategic and programmatic offer in Uzbekistan, including cross-cutting issues, as well as the results of the outcome analysis. The main factors that influenced UNDP performance and contribution to results are also described. The assessment was based on an analysis of the correlation between the results of the projects, their contribution to the expected outputs under each outcome and, consequently, to the overall objectives of the programme. The independent review of the UNDP Uzbekistan CPD 2021-2025 yielded 30 essential findings, six key conclusions and seven actionable strategic and programmatic recommendations.

2.1 UNDP strategic and programmatic offer

Finding 1. The current Uzbekistan CPD showcased more dynamic implementation and marked a significant advancement over the previous cycle, with more relevant, people-centred and effective implementation, better alignment with global standards and priorities, enhanced governance reforms and expanded international cooperation.

The comparison of the past and current CPD implementation in Uzbekistan revealed significant adaptations and shifts in national priorities and international collaboration. During previous CPDs, the national focus was on strict regulations, with limited initiatives for economic liberalization. Governance initiatives were minimal and primarily concentrated on aid for trade, rather than broader economic development. There was no significant push towards energy efficiency.

In the cycle under review, the CPD emphasized inclusive growth, gender equality, anti-corruption measures, sustainable energy and the environment, engagement with CSOs, and a stronger focus on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) initiatives. These were not only aligned with evolving national priorities, but also reflected a growing international interest, particularly from donors, in areas such as green energy and sustainable development. The focus shifted significantly from aid-for-trade to broader economic development, with greater attention to social inclusion and governance reforms. Despite these achievements, and positive feedback in general, stakeholders indicated that the overarching structure of the United Nations sometimes made it difficult for the country office to adapt to emerging situations.

The present programme cycle also demonstrated a more dynamic and responsive approach. Whereas the previous CPD primarily centred on legislative aspects, the current cycle also included practical, on the ground implementation of national reforms. The UNDP strategy and implementation under Outcome 1 was particularly evident in its work on anti-corruption, access to justice and strengthening governance institutions and processes to guarantee inclusion, transparency and accountability. UNDP engagement in these areas represented traditional UNDP comparative advantage, including its ability to serve as a convening agency within the United Nations system.

Finding 2. UNDP focused on social inclusion, poverty reduction and inequality alleviation through integrated, evidence-based financing that aligned with national development goals.

The UNDP strategy primarily aimed to establish a workable policy framework for the Government to sustainably finance its long-term commitments to the SDGs, with a particular focus on health, social assistance and the environment. Under Outcome 2, UNDP supported the development of integrated funding frameworks to promote inclusive growth, particularly for women and youth, and aimed to strengthen financial foundations through capacity-building in trade policy, export diversification and support for World Trade Organization (WTO) membership. Within Outcome 3, UNDP focused on improving livelihoods and decent work through training programmes in digital skills and green agriculture, entrepreneurship

support and enhancing labour market services. These activities targeted women and youth in vulnerable regions, such as the Aral Sea area and Fergana Valley, and addressed key areas of poverty and inequality by promoting inclusive, sustainable development across the country. UNDP support for fiscal transparency, including inclusive local citizen budgeting, green growth and gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), aimed to close the gap between needs and resources for achieving the SDGs.

Finding 3. UNDP responded to several acute challenges faced by Uzbekistan in the areas of energy and environment, leveraging its comparative advantages to support a green transition and environmental sustainability. However, opportunities to further strengthen the quality, depth and accessibility of environmental data were not fully seized.

The early and sustained emphasis of UNDP on a green transition aimed to reduce the environmental vulnerability of Uzbekistan, particularly in relation to natural resource management and climate change. This strategic focus aligned with Uzbekistan's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, and supported the National Strategy for Transition to a Green Economy by 2030, to reduce emissions through renewable energy adoption, resource efficiency improvements, higher crop yields and prevention of land degradation.

UNDP made notable progress on challenges within the energy and environmental sectors, though the 2024 National State of the Environment Report highlighted that the limited availability, accessibility and quality of environmental data hindered foreign investment and effective environmental management.²⁹ UNDP took steps to address these data gaps, focusing on biodiversity data.³⁰ In the energy sector, the country office focused its efforts on support to revise legislative frameworks and financial tools to promote the green transition. UNDP also contributed to energy monitoring by developing software to collect and analyse energy consumption data in residential buildings. The ICPE found that additional improvements to enhance data quality and online access could have been achieved through advocacy and emphasis on data improvement within ongoing projects, even without additional funding.

Finding 4. UNDP strengthened its strategic positioning in Uzbekistan, building on its reputation as a trusted long-term development partner of the Government, its integrator role, innovative approaches and ability to forge strategic partnerships.

The country office acted as an integrator for the United Nations Agenda 2030 in the areas on governance, environmental sustainability and gender equality. The convening power of UNDP was instrumental in fostering collaboration between line ministries, development partners and civil society, promoting a "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" approach essential to drive transformational change. Duty bearers especially praised UNDP for its flexibility, adaptability, technical expertise and versatility during the implementation of joint projects.

The country office also established strategic partnerships with bilateral actors, IFIs, EU member States and non-state actors such as the media, CSOs, academia and the private sector. UNDP work in the Aral Sea region demonstrated its holistic solutions to environmental and socioeconomic challenges. UNDP strategic positioning was further strengthened because of its unique role as the sole United Nations agency actively engaged in SDG financing, and its promotion of green financing with innovative mechanisms such as

Government of Uzbekistan and ISSD (2024) National State of the Environment Report: https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2024-02/uzbekistan-state-of-the-environment-en.pdf. United Nations Uzbekistan (2021) Development Finance Assessment for the Republic of Uzbekistan: https://inff.org/assets/resource/uzb--20dfa_eng_final.pdf

As an example, the Biodiversity Conservation Information Management System was developed/installed by UNDP as a system for the dissemination of data on national flora and fauna, including local and global red-listed species, as well as scientific collections of animals and plants and land types per national legislation and norms.

subsidized prices for renewable energy sources and green bonds. UNDP also played a critical role in linking sustainable development issues across sectors, promoting new collaboration methods within and across government and society to achieve the SDGs.

While its innovative approaches and integrator role reinforced the position of UNDP in Uzbekistan, additional efforts were needed to strengthen stakeholder relationships, ensure the sustainability of interventions and maximize the impact of its initiatives across all regions and sectors of the country. There was a significant window of opportunity, particularly compared to the previous cycle, to further integrate civil society into the landmark contributions of the CPD, such as good governance, resilient and inclusive growth and environmental sustainability. The country office can further leverage this opportunity to expand its collaboration with CSOs in both scope and scale, by strengthening their capacity to fully carry out oversight functions. This would involve engaging CSOs more comprehensively across various sectors, especially given the stronger presence of UNDP compared to other United Nations agencies.

Finding 5. During this cycle, UNDP Uzbekistan initiated the adoption of a portfolio approach to enhance coherence in its programming and promote a more systemic response to interdependent social, economic and environmental issues. Given that implementation was in early stages, it was not yet suitable for assessment.

The country office received training to improve their understanding of the portfolio approach, but progress remained limited to the initial phases of identification and design. Country office respondents explained that the implementation of a systemic and integrated portfolio approach was hampered by several factors: i) hesitance from stakeholders, including country office staff, to fully endorse an approach with uncertain benefits; ii) insufficient financial and human resources, for example, though the "Future of Work" portfolio was designed in 2022, the country office lacked the necessary budget to launch it effectively, despite backing from senior management and the willingness of RBEC to assist; and iii) challenges related to the specificities of funding sources in each priority area, including complex stakeholder coordination, inadequate harmonization of diverse project objectives and difficulty in achieving effective collaboration. Country office respondents highlighted that, under the portfolio approach, M&E could become more complex and resource-intensive, requiring revised frameworks and risk management processes. Additionally, government administrative processes can slow decision-making, while effective knowledge sharing across projects would require dedicated efforts.

Finding 6. The UNDP country office successfully identified synergies at the level of the SDGs, but programmatic integration across CPD outcomes was limited, reducing the potential impact of cross-cutting issues like anti-corruption and environmental justice. Key opportunities for collaboration across outcomes were missed, particularly to link aspects of sustainability, resilience and gender equality, due to funding constraints and the geographic and thematic separation of projects.

The UNDP country office made substantial progress in advancing cross-cutting issues such as GEWE, anti-corruption, transparency and environmental justice across its outcomes. Overall, the country office effectively integrated cross-cutting issues within individual projects, despite funding constraints, achieving substantial progress in each area. While individual achievements were notable, further integration and collaboration across outcomes could have enhanced synergy, helping UNDP to deliver a more cohesive and impactful approach to advancing its CPD objectives.

In the area of GEWE, the country office successfully implemented impactful projects under Outcomes 2 and 3 to promote economic empowerment and skills development. However, the lack of coordination between thematically aligned but regionally disparate projects—such as the Afghan Women project in Surkhandarya and other GEWE initiatives in Ferghana—limited opportunities for collaboration and shared learning, reducing their potential impact.

UNDP achieved significant strides in anti-corruption measures, embedded into projects to bolster institutional accountability and transparency. Individual projects demonstrated strong anti-corruption outcomes, though these initiatives could have been better connected across outcomes. The systematic linkage of anti-corruption efforts across different areas could further reinforce the country office commitment to accountable and transparent governance.

UNDP supported transparency efforts across multiple sectors by enhancing government data-sharing and accountability, with notable progress in integrating transparency frameworks into specific projects. For example, UNDP assisted the Government in improving data transparency through initiatives such as the national system for a green economy transition and NDC 3.0, and by engaging with emerging institutions like the National Climate Centre and Climate Council. However, these efforts were not consistently embedded across outcomes, leaving opportunities to expand their application and foster greater public trust and sustainable impacts.

The country office made initial efforts to adopt the 2022 UNDP guidelines Environmental Justice.³¹ Initiatives such as the Fergana Valley water mediation project and Just Energy transition demonstrated the potential for environmental justice to enhance climate resilience and economic empowerment, especially in specific regional projects in the Aral Sea area. However, environmental justice principles within projects under Outcomes 1 and 4, alongside resilience and inclusion priorities under Outcome 3, did not amplify synergy and complementarity, and therefore did not contribute to a more integrated approach. There were at least two instances where such synergetic approaches between the outcomes could have been implemented in line with the principles of the UNDP Environmental Justice guidance.³² Firstly, while BIOFIN and other Outcome 4 initiatives addressed policy-level and community-driven aspects of environmental sustainability, there was no evidence of them adequately addressing systemic issues linked to environmental crimes and their impact on human rights.³³ Secondly, in the Aral Sea region, there was no evidence of capacity-building for relevant stakeholders to prosecute illegal activities that undermined environmental recovery and community resilience for climate-resilient development.³⁴

Finding 7. The country office employed the three Strategic Enablers—strategic innovation, development financing and digitalization—to support State priorities, though their application varied across projects depending on available resources. The application of the Enablers was limited in some areas due to resource constraints, but their strategic focus laid the groundwork for broader impact across key projects. The country office also made notable strides in innovative approaches, such as green financing and sustainable development, though with potential to integrate these innovations more comprehensively into the overall country programme.

³¹ UNDP (2022) Environmental Justice – Securing our right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment https://www.undp.org/rolhr/justice/environmental-justice

³² Ihid

These aspects could have been integrated into Outcome 1 by responding to the growing trend of criminalizing environmental offenses and enhancing enforcement through capacity-building measures, including training judicial and law enforcement professionals to handle environmental cases in alignment with international standards and principles of environmental justice. See also: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/undp-kazakhstan_today-the-undp-istanbul-regional-hub-and-activity-7265297289563320320-6aGm

Addressing pollution and biodiversity loss requires not just policy alignment but legally binding measures to hold offenders accountable, including training judicial and law enforcement professionals to handle environmental cases in alignment with international standards and principles of environmental justice.

Strategic innovation was primarily driven by the Accelerator Lab, which applied systems thinking, foresight exercises and gender-responsive approaches to support projects across multiple outcomes. Accelerator Lab initiatives, such as the Future of Work and Gender-responsive Smart Cities, contributed to UNDP work across outcomes, fostering economic and social resilience as well as environmental protection and climate resilience. Development financing efforts mobilized resources through green bonds and public-private partnerships, advancing sustainable economic development in line with national priorities. Digitalization strengthened governance systems, particularly through the use of e-governance tools in health and anti-corruption projects, promoting inclusiveness, transparency and accountability.

Despite these achievements, resource constraints limited the full application of the three Enablers across projects. For instance, despite the high demand, UNDP comparative advantage in e-justice could not be fully leveraged due to capacity limitations. For example, respondents revealed that limited internal human and technical capacity in areas such as information management systems for digital justice hindered the ability of the country office to fully digitalize and connect all components of the law and justice system.

2.1.1 Effective governance and justice for all

Outcome 1: By 2025, all people and groups in Uzbekistan, especially the most vulnerable, demand and benefit from enhanced accountable, transparent, inclusive and gender-responsive governance systems and rule of law institutions for a life free from discrimination and violence.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 1.1: Institutions equipped with effective anti-corruption tools, enabled to expand access to justice and enhance social cohesion.

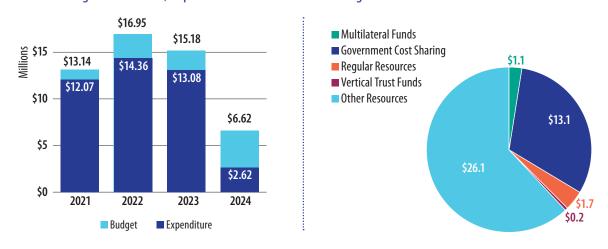
Output 1.2: Digitalized and inclusive people-centred public service delivery models promoted.

Output 1.3: Electoral and parliamentary processes and institutions strengthened to promote inclusion, transparency and accountability.

The 26 projects under Outcome 1 had a total budget of \$51.9 million, with \$42.1 million spent between January 2021 and July 2024. During the current CPD cycle, most of the funding came from other resources³⁵ (\$15.7 million), supported by significant contributions from government cost-sharing (\$11.5 million), bilateral and multilateral donors (\$13.1 million) and country office regular resources (\$1.7 million). Figure 4 provides an overview of the budget allocated to Outcome 1.

The evaluation team received full information on the total amounts available for CPD implementation, but the sources of funding were not always disclosed entirely. To provide a clear picture of the resources available, the evaluation team decided to include this information under the "other resources" label.

FIGURE 4. Budgeted amounts, expenditure and sources of funding in Outcome 1



Source: Atlas project data, as of 22nd July 2024

Finding 8. UNDP made laudable contributions to advancing key human rights and anti-corruption reforms and strengthened governance systems through capacity-building and innovation. Persistent systemic barriers in this sector prevented this outcome from fully contributing to its intended goals.

Over the past 30 years, UNDP consistently supported the advancement of the rule of law in Uzbekistan, including through 12 landmark projects. In the cycle under review, significant strides were made in enhancing anti-corruption frameworks, digitalizing public services, and promoting inclusivity.³⁶ These efforts contributed to the national agenda of advancing the rule of law and ensuring a more inclusive governance framework, and improving the normative environment and service accessibility. In 2023, Uzbekistan was 78th (out of 142 countries) in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, up from 94th (of 126) in 2019, reflecting the significant efforts of the Government to enhance judicial independence, combat corruption and increase transparency and protection of fundamental rights.³⁷ These reforms indicated a substantial shift towards stronger governance and adherence to international rule of law standards, highlighting Uzbekistan's commitment to ongoing legal and institutional improvements.

In the field of anti-corruption, UNDP contributed to strengthening anti-corruption measures, enhancing accountability and implementing digital transparency tools. The landmark (and largest to date) anti-corruption project in the Central Asian region significantly benefited from robust policy and programme support from the UNDP Global Anti-Corruption for Peaceful and Inclusive Societies (ACPIS) project and Istanbul Regional Hub. This collaboration was pivotal in integrating sophisticated anti-corruption solutions into legislative and policy frameworks, incorporating global best practices and performing corruption risk assessments in vital sectors. Capacity-building and advocacy initiatives tailored for government agencies bolstered efforts in corruption prevention. The UNDP team played a crucial role in facilitating global and regional advocacy, organizing study visits to benchmark countries and equipping the newly established Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) with essential tools to enhance its effectiveness in combating corruption.

In 2019-2024, the country office implemented a broad spectrum of digital initiatives for the Ministry of Justice, including an online platform to apply for licenses, digitization of the civil registry, introduction of an electronic apostille and establishing a Situation Centre for real-time monitoring of service delivery in over 200 Public Service Centres across the country.

World Justice Project: Uzbekistan data (accessed August 2024) https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2019/Uzbekistan/

Leveraging their extensive global experience in supporting ACAs, both UNDP and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime were strategically positioned to support the Government to fortify anti-corruption measures.³⁸

While these contributions were valuable, fostering political will was essential for more comprehensive adoption and implementation of anti-corruption tools and practices, to effectively address systemic issues. For instance, the implementation of Uzbekistan's asset declaration system faced considerable obstacles, linked to a lack of implementation capacity, critical mass of actors or political backing. The combination of these factors hindered progress towards a more accountable and corruption-free society as envisaged in the CPD.³⁹ There remained further challenges to fully realize the extensive objectives set forth by UNDP, such as slow implementation of reforms, limited capacity and difficulties in coordination among the law and justice stakeholders. This indicated a need for continued focus and adaptation, enhanced sustainability approaches, and comprehensive and dedicated support for CSOs to ensure comprehensive implementation across all CPD outcomes.

The introduction of compliance systems, integrity checks, improved asset declaration processes and technical assistance in the development of ethics codes marked a critical step forward, strengthening governance frameworks not only in Uzbekistan but also in the region.⁴⁰ However, this ICPE highlights that the impact of the landmark anti-corruption initiative could have been enhanced by promoting the project to other country offices in the region, even on a pilot basis. In this way, the country office, the Global Anti-Corruption Team in Singapore and the Istanbul Regional Hub could scale anti-corruption measures, share valuable insights and strategies across different jurisdictions and potentially amplify project successes.

Respondents commented that continuous UNDP support was pivotal in building the capacity of justice and law enforcement actors and national human rights institutions, to ensure their alignment with international standards. Furthermore, UNDP capacity-building support and advocacy with the Parliament and line ministries contributed to improved legislation, the promotion of people-centred policies, and stronger capacity of civil society, media, academia, legal professionals and public oversight mechanisms, all of which bolstered the rule of law.

The country office adapted its approach to promote a 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' framework, and succeeded in bringing together duty bearers and rights holders to facilitate inclusion and participation in the implementation of projects. The scope and scale of these interventions could have been expanded to enhance their impact. Initially, the country office approach to combating corruption in Uzbekistan was predominantly focused on engagement with government-led initiatives, with limited involvement of CSOs, the private sector, youth and independent media. CSOs in Uzbekistan were not as vibrant as in some other countries and their capacity still developing. The current anti-corruption project placed significant emphasis on the demand side of anti-corruption efforts, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including CSOs, NGOs and activists, media and the private sector. The country office made a strategic decision to distribute funds to CSOs with limited capacity, cautiously aiming to strike a balance

10 Ibid.

Throughout the period 2018 to 2022, numerous draft laws and legal documents were meticulously crafted with indispensable guidance and expertise offered by ACPIS. Remarkably, the project resulted in the development of the following draft laws: "On Anti-Corruption Expertise"; "On the Anti-Corruption Agency"; "On Presentation of Conflict of Interest"; "On Declaration of Assets"; "On Public Civil Service"; "On State Financial Control"; and "On State Internal Control and Internal Audit", along with associated comments and recommendations. ACPIS also provided substantial support in preparing a manual and offering comments on the Law of Administrative Procedures, and creating draft model acts on compliance to further enhance anti-corruption efforts, and prepared a comprehensive package of documents related to state financial controls and internal audits.

³⁹ UNDP (2023) Preventing corruption through effective, accountable and transparent governance institutions in Uzbekistan' Project Final Report.

between providing financial support and ensuring that funding recipients were able to use them efficiently. The grants provided to CSOs had a short timeframe (six months), with budgets too small to ensure sustained results. This design choice hindered the capacity of CSOs to achieve meaningful and sustained impact.⁴¹

Finding 9. UNDP continued to support the Government to strengthen the legal aid ecosystem to improve access to justice, strengthen collaboration between government bodies and civil society, enhance the protection of rights for persons with disabilities (PWD) and facilitate the analysis of judicial practice.

UNDP strategically advanced the law on free legal aid by supporting the development of guiding regulations and facilitating a comprehensive legal aid framework.⁴² A roadmap was drafted to build a comprehensive legal aid ecosystem and strengthen legal aid capacities. The country office played a pivotal role in training a critical mass of lawyers and members of the Chamber of Advocates of the Republic of Uzbekistan authorized to provide free gender-sensitive legal aid services. According to data collected during the field visit, UNDP supported 20 NGOs currently providing legal aid services, with one organization alone assisting 2,000 individuals. This support included grants and equipment, with nine low-value grants allocated to NGOs in 2024 for activities such as awareness campaigns, capacity-building workshops, advocacy and direct legal support to marginalized communities. The Ministry of Justice reports that 40,381 persons were provided secondary free legal aid as a result of the support received. Additionally, training programmes were established and six legal clinics were created for students, enabling law students to provide legal assistance to victims of IPV and GBV. The legal clinics provided 2,558 legal consultations (1,262 to women).⁴³ Involving NGOs in delivering legal aid was a commendable step forward. Enhancing financial mechanisms to continuously support CSOs, beyond the state-supported NGO Madad, would help to ensure the sustainability of these efforts.⁴⁴ There is also a valuable opportunity to further strengthen the legal aid system by developing a structured management framework and establishing quality standards for legal aid.

UNDP supported the Ministry of Justice to develop and approve a preliminary concept for a case management system tailored for free legal aid providers. This system is designed to allow individuals in need to apply for, receive and monitor the provision of free legal aid through a unified portal, potentially enhancing the sustainability of the monitoring process. However, the present evaluation could not verify how the quality of these legal aid services was monitored, or identify the specific entities responsible for independent oversight of legal services provided. There was no clear information on the incentives and support systems to ensure the highest quality of legal aid, or on the mechanisms to monitor service availability and quality at each stage of a case—whether State-supported legal aid, CSOs or legal clinics. The ICPE also highlighted a lack of systematic tracking of case outcomes and client satisfaction, which limited insights into the effectiveness of services provided and hindered the ability of UNDP to implement targeted improvements.⁴⁵ Without robust monitoring and quality assurance systems, it was challenging to ensure consistency, accountability and high standards across all legal aid providers. Analysis of the multi-year project (funded by the Government of Finland) supporting this intervention showed that the indicators in the results framework focused primarily on the structural and accessibility aspects, and did not effectively measure the quality or effectiveness of the legal aid delivered. The current framework for selecting CSOs to provide legal aid, supported by both the State and UNDP, could benefit from clearer and stronger mechanisms to monitor conflicts of interest.

⁴¹ E.g., "Sub-grants or grant schemes must provide sufficient time-bound resources to CSOs, including institutional support budgets." From: UNDP (2023) Preventing corruption through effective, accountable and transparent governance institutions in Uzbekistan' Project Final Report.

The Law "On Provision of Legal Aid at the Expense of the State" took effect on September 18, 2023.

⁴³ Source: Project Semi Annual Progress Report.

⁴⁴ The NGO Madad was established in 2019, and is currently the only remaining NGO established by the State and financed by the Ministry of Justice.

⁴⁵ UNDP. Evaluation of the UNDP Support to Access to Justice; 2023. Available at: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/a2j.shtml.

UNDP e-justice interventions significantly enhanced the quality of processes and services in governance and the rule of law, though there is an opportunity to further assess their impact on access to justice for the most vulnerable groups. UNDP is currently in the process of conducting Uzbekistan's first legal needs assessment survey and developing a methodology to analyse court decisions in gender-sensitive cases. Addressing gaps in detailed, disaggregated data from the justice sector would be key to evaluate and maximize the reach and effectiveness of these interventions for those at risk of being left behind. Specialized tools and methodologies would enable the effective collection of this crucial data, supporting more tailored and impactful interventions. It is expected that by the next CPD review, the country office will be able to present comprehensive findings, to contribute to the enhancement of the justice data ecosystem and informing future policy reforms in Uzbekistan.

Finding 10. UNDP efforts to support the digital transformation of public service delivery by introducing new comprehensive digital systems in the justice sector led to improvements in access and efficiency. By streamlining processes and making them more user-friendly, UNDP enhanced the overall effectiveness of public services, aligning with global trends in digital governance. This initiative underscored the role of UNDP in advancing technological progress for public benefit, though further measures could be taken to improve digital literacy and internet access in rural areas and address data protection concerns more effectively.

In various countries, digital technologies proved to enhance the transparency and accountability of the justice sector by providing valuable data and statistics on court timelines, case resolutions, justice needs and user experiences. ⁴⁶ This strategic use of technology supported more informed decision-making and strengthened the overall effectiveness of the justice system. The Uzbekistan country office supported the implementation of a specialized algorithm for data collection and analysis, enabling the Ministry of Justice to identify and address inefficiencies in justice service delivery. The adoption of the E-SUD tool, which utilized templates to streamline case processing, significantly reduced the frequency of court visits for involved parties and lightened judges' caseloads. ⁴⁷ The E-SUD electronic court system was initiated in 2014 by UNDP, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan under the 'Rule of Law Partnership in Uzbekistan' project, and implemented across all 89 civil courts in Uzbekistan. It aimed to reduce paperwork and bureaucracy, enhancing access to justice. In January 2021, E-SUD was integrated with the information and communication technology systems of the economic, administrative and criminal courts, forming a comprehensive electronic justice system across the nation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the urgency to implement solutions led UNDP to expedite digitalization decisions, including virtual legal aid support, with limited opportunities to influence regulatory reforms, potentially affecting data security and privacy. There was an opportunity to further enhance the implementation of e-justice solutions supported by the country office by incorporating more comprehensive assessments of data protection, data control, security and privacy. Recent UNDP guidelines to strengthen the overall effectiveness and reliability of digital solutions were not yet fully implemented. Some initiatives providing free legal advice and support via digital channels did not clearly guarantee standards of digital privacy and data protection, for example, students and professors from the Tashkent State University of Law operating a free legal clinic through a dedicated Telegram channel. Clearer documentation was

UNDP (2023) Evaluation of the UNDP Support to Access to Justice, Finding 13: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/a2j.shtml

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ UNDP (2022) Toolkit Strategic Transformation through e-Justice: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-06/E%20justice-Toolkit%20_04.pdf. According to the Toolkit, before launching e-justice initiatives, it is essential to conduct assessments on the legal framework, stakeholder readiness, technological infrastructure, data security and access equity. These evaluations ensure that the legal system is prepared for digitalization, that the necessary technology and security are in place and that all users, especially marginalized groups, can effectively access and benefit from the e-justice system.

needed to show how UNDP Digital Standards were applied in needs assessments and the evaluation of e-justice solutions, to emphasize the importance of thoroughly assessing needs and the digital divide and continuously testing solutions for effectiveness.⁴⁹ These standards prioritize 'do no harm,' robust data protection and the use of existing platforms where possible, ensuring that digital solutions are ethical, secure and aligned with sustainable development goals. This framework was designed to support UNDP teams in delivering impactful and responsible digital solutions.

Finding 11. UNDP made significant contributions to enhancing digital literacy and technical skills among youth in Uzbekistan, particularly focusing on young women.

UNDP conducted several digitalization projects in Uzbekistan, such as supporting the 'www.mygov.uz' platform and advancing digital transformation. In 2022, UNDP conducted research on the gender digital divide, highlighting significant disparities and leading to initiatives aimed at encouraging female participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), in collaboration with UN Women. By organising training programmes and distributing digital tools, UNDP notably enhanced the employability and competitive stance among youth in Uzbekistan, particularly focusing on young women in the global marketplace. For example, the Youth Digital Skills initiative reported that 6,000 individuals found jobs based on the trainings provided. Initiatives such as the "Digital Pulse" platform and the IT Women project not only raised awareness, but also encouraged the active participation of women in the digital economy, supporting SDGs 8 and 9 by promoting a robust digital economy and an entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy was criticized for its gender blindness, underscoring the need for a comprehensive gender audit to address the barriers preventing women from assuming decision-making roles in a male-dominated ministry.

UNDP contributions extended to shaping the digital entrepreneurship landscape through comprehensive policy recommendations, integral to the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. This included the development of youth-focused digital economy policies and the establishment of M&E guidelines to ensure the effectiveness of digital entrepreneurship programmes for youth. This is expected to foster a conducive environment for digital innovation and entrepreneurship if sustained during the ongoing period.

While progress was made in terms of addressing challenges linked to digital literacy and infrastructure disparities, expanding access and ensuring that services benefit all communities more equitably, there were unseized opportunities to further enhance the universal adoption of digital services, especially in rural areas.

⁴⁹ UNDP (2024) Digital Standards: https://www.undp.org/digital/standards

Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan. 'Youth Digital Skills.' Last accessed: 14 November 2024. Available at: https://youthskills.uz/

⁵¹ UNDP. Gender Digital Divide Assessment: Uzbekistan, 2022.

2.1.2 Effective SDG financing and new ways of addressing poverty and inequalities

Outcome 2: By 2025, the population of Uzbekistan benefits from a more harmonized and integrated implementation of the reform agenda due to strengthened policy coherence, evidence-based and inclusive decision-making and financing for development, mainstreamed in line with national SDGs.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 2.1: Effective SDG financing framework developed and promoted through coherent gender responsive, evidence-based policy implementation, innovative financing and coordination platform.

Output 2.2: Cross-cutting and comprehensive reform agenda developed through lenses of poverty and inequality reduction with an integrated monitoring framework in line with the SDGs.

The 12 projects under Outcome 2 had a total budget of \$7.6 million; and expenditure of \$5.6 million between January 2021 and July 2024. During the current CPD cycle, government cost-sharing accounted for half of the expenditure (\$3.2 million), with complementary financing from bilateral and multilateral funds (\$2.3 million) and country office regular resources (\$1 million). Most funds were allocated and spent in the first two years of the CPD cycle. Figure 5 provides an overview of the budget allocated to Outcome 2.

Outcome 2 spanned the health and socioeconomic sectors to improve the harmonization and integrated implementation of the reform agenda. While some projects addressed the rapid COVID-19 response, others focused on sustainable development for vulnerable and marginalized communities, targeting the creation of business opportunities and empowering Afghan women. Three out of four Outcome 2 projects featured a significant gender equality component and were implemented through Direct Implementation Modality (DIM).

Bilateral/Multilateral funds ■ Government Cost Sharing \$0.1 Regular Resources Other Resources \$2.2 \$1.71 \$2 -\$3.2 \$0.20 \$0.02 \$0 2021 2022 2023 2024 Budget **■** Expenditure

FIGURE 5. Budgeted amounts, expenditure and sources of funding in Outcome 2 in millions US\$

Source: Atlas project data, as of 22nd July 2024

Finding 12. UNDP contributed to development outcomes by advancing innovative financing through the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), enhancing fiscal transparency and supporting sustainable projects with SDG bond issuance and Islamic finance instruments.

UNDP support was crucial in advancing the Action Strategy 2017-2021 for State policy on economic development and poverty reduction, specifically the INFF and fiscal transparency. UNDP was instrumental in developing the INFF, which aimed to align, mobilize and manage public and private finance to support SDG-aligned national policies. This framework included the elaboration of an Integrated SDG Financing Strategy, SDG and climate budget-tagging practices, participatory budgeting, and the introduction of innovative financing instruments such as SDG bonds. In 2023, UNDP supported the Government to mobilize private investment in its first SDG bond issuance of \$350 million on the London Stock Exchange. Proceeds were to be used to finance environmental, transportation and sanitation initiatives. UNDP also supported the development of the SDG bond framework for the issuance and identification of eligible green projects and strengthened capacity for reporting the use of the proceeds. In collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank, UNDP launched interventions to develop an enabling environment for Islamic finance instruments, particularly the "Green Sukuk", to support the financing of green projects in Uzbekistan. Particularly the "Green Sukuk", to support the financing of green projects in Uzbekistan.

Finding 13. UNDP contributed to enhancing local development and governance by: supporting participatory budgeting initiatives that empowered citizens to influence project funding; fostering dialogue between government and civil society and promoting transparency in Surkhandarya; and broadly advancing trade capacity and promoting economic growth through technical assistance to the WTO accession process, sustainable practices and export readiness.

UNDP made significant strides in advancing local development, governance and economic growth in Uzbekistan through a focus on participatory governance and trade capacity-building. The programme promoted sustainable practices, fostered economic modernization and enhanced trade readiness, aligning closely with the National Action Strategy for the Further Development of Uzbekistan (2017-2021).

A key aspect of UNDP support for governance was its contribution to participatory budgeting in Surkhandarya, where citizens were empowered to vote on and prioritize local community projects funded through a dedicated 5 percent set-aside. This approach allowed investments to directly reflect community needs and preferences, with nearly 35,000 projects proposed in 2024, 11 million votes cast and approximately \$230 million allocated.⁵³ The initiative saw annual increases in participation and respondents noted that it improved dialogue between the government and civil society.⁵⁴ This enhanced transparency and democratized the budgeting process, ensuring that local development aligned closely with citizen priorities.

Green Sukuk are Shari'ah compliant investments in renewable energy and other environmental assets. They address Shari'ah concern for protecting the environment. Proceeds are used to finance construction, refinance construction debt, or to finance the payment of a government-granted green subsidy. They may involve securitising future income cash flows from ring-fenced projects or assets with specific criteria attached. See the Climate Bonds Initiative. https://www.climatebonds.net/projects/facilitation/green-sukuk

⁵³ Citizen budgets in Uzbekistan are simplified versions of government budgets designed to make fiscal information accessible to the general public. Their aim is to increase transparency, promote public engagement in budgeting processes and enhance government accountability. These documents break down complex financial data into easy-to-understand formats, often using infographics and straightforward explanations.

⁵⁴ Khamidov, Khabibulla (2024) Citizen Participation in Budget Formation: Uzbekistan's experience. https://theasiatoday.org/news/citizen-participation-in-budget-formation-uzbekistans-experience/

In parallel, UNDP strengthened Uzbekistan's trade capacity and economic resilience by supporting WTO accession and fostering niche value chains in key sectors such as dried fruits, vegetables, nuts and mung beans.⁵⁵ The programme provided micro, small and medium size enterprises with training, workshops and guidance on international standards and certifications, helping increase their productivity and competitiveness in global markets. Survey data indicated that 92.6 percent of participating Uzbek companies reported increased sales since 2018, with substantial gains in export competitiveness, agricultural productivity and value chain development across food processing and tourism sectors.⁵⁶

The Aid for Trade in Central Asia – Phase IV project played a crucial role, and was well aligned with national economic goals, focusing on trade expansion, private sector development and green, forward-looking production methods. It contributed to achieving SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), evidenced by a "moderate improvement" in 2023. Additionally, the project advanced GEWE, making "a significant contribution to the realization of SDG 5" through targeted support for women entrepreneurs.⁵⁷

UNDP support also extended to building capacity within public and trade support services, resulting in greater efficiency and gender-responsiveness in government institutions. Efforts to diversify export markets and logistics routes proved essential in responding to external shocks, further supporting micro, small and medium-sized businesses through economic recovery.

2.1.3 Innovative policies for resilient and inclusive growth

Outcome 3: By 2025, youth, women and vulnerable groups benefit from improved livelihood access, decent work and expanded opportunities generated by inclusive and equitable economic growth.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 3.1: Women, youth and people from remote rural areas benefit from better skills, sustainable jobs and strengthened livelihoods

Output 3.2: Public institutions and private entities have improved capacities to design and implement innovative policies for inclusive, resilient economic growth and reduced regional inequalities

The 11 projects under Outcome 3 had a total budget of \$10.7 million; and expenditure of \$7.2 million between January 2021 and July 2024. During the current CPD cycle, the largest portion of funding came from bilateral and multilateral funds (\$4.5 million), with complementary contributions from other resources (\$2.5 million). Figure 6 provides an overview of the budget allocated to Outcome 3.

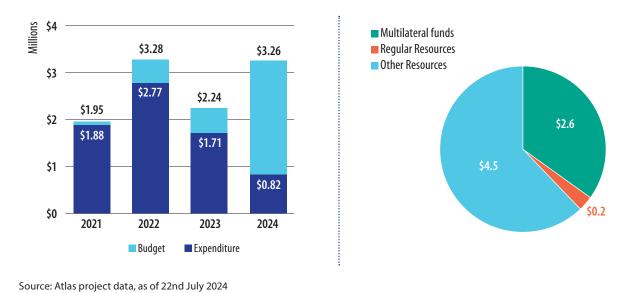
Outcome 3 aims to redistribute the benefits of economic growth equally among vulnerable groups, particularly youth, women, PWD and marginalized communities. Most projects under Outcome 3 included a significant gender equality component and were implemented by national authorities using the National Implementation Modality (NIM).

UNDP (2023) Final Evaluation of the UNDP project 'Aid for Trade in Central Asia – Phase IV' (2018-2023).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

FIGURE 6. Budgeted amounts, expenditure and sources of funding in Outcome 3 in millions US\$



Finding 14. UNDP initiatives contributed on a small scale towards enhancing skills, creating sustainable jobs and strengthening livelihoods for women, youth and people from rural areas in Uzbekistan.

In previous years, the Government had established multiple *Ishga Markhamat* monocentres⁵⁸ across the country, e.g., in Tashkent, Fergana and Gulistan. These centres are part of the Government's initiative to address unemployment by providing vocational training and skills development services, particularly targeting youth and job seekers. With UNDP support, the Government took significant steps to ensure the growth of these monocentres. More specifically, UNDP collaborated with the monocentres to develop and adapt training materials according to WorldSkills standards, ensuring graduates receive internationally recognized qualifications.⁵⁹ According to the country office, the enhancement of monocentres enabled more than 3,400 beneficiaries, including youth and women, to develop vocational skills in areas such as hairdressing, cooking and plumbing, which in turn improved their employability. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, UNDP helped launch projects to adapt skills training in response to the post-pandemic economic landscape, especially in regions like the Fergana Valley. UNDP also conducted workshops to improve the skills of monocentre staff, focused on enhancing interaction with the public, aligning services with international standards and improved job placement opportunities for graduates.

Building on these efforts, UNDP undertook several targeted initiatives to address broader economic and employment challenges in Uzbekistan, focusing on digital skills and entrepreneurship to further enhance opportunities for youth and vulnerable groups. The "Empowering Youth to Embrace Digital Economy & Entrepreneurship" and "Adapting Population Skills to the Post-Pandemic Economy in Fergana Valley" projects provided young entrepreneurs, graduates, informal workers and vulnerable groups with digital

Monocentres are training centres that aim to provide technical and vocational education to citizens and migrants aiming to enhance their employability.

WorldSkills standards are detailed benchmarks that outline the knowledge, skills and competencies required to perform specific jobs or tasks at a high level of proficiency. These standards are developed by WorldSkills International, a global, non-profit organization that promotes vocational skills through competitions, education and training initiatives. It serves as an international platform to raise the standards of vocational skills and inspire young people to pursue careers in skilled trades.

skills training, entrepreneurial support and mentorship, fostering innovation and supporting youth-led startups. The country office reported that 43 youth-led small businesses were able to expand and create jobs, through the Integrated Business Support and Small Business Support programmes and were provided with equipment grants to aid their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts supported the redesign of Government labour market programmes focusing on the integration of labour market services, e.g., the integration of employment services, job matching and placements, with a particular emphasis on training programmes tailored to post-pandemic economic needs. Respondents noted that the UNDP-supported initiatives led to successful startups and job creation in the local economy, although specific numbers were unknown.

Through these efforts, UNDP contributed to reducing regional disparities and fostering sustainable development. At the same time, given the small scale of the projects under Outcome 3, their contribution to structural and transformational change at the national level remained rather limited. The generally positive feedback from beneficiaries under Outcome 3 underlined the effectiveness of UNDP support for direct participants. In interviews, several female and young entrepreneurs reported improved capacity and greater confidence in engaging with the digital economy. They highlighted the value of the training and the additional support provided, which equipped them to overcome the challenges of starting and growing their businesses. However, respondents noted that many potential beneficiaries in rural areas were unaware of these UNDP-supported government services or lacked digital access to them.

Finding 15. UNDP contributed to advancing the use of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index (N-MPI) in Uzbekistan, enabling a more comprehensive approach to poverty measurement. This supported evidence-based policymaking, helping the Government to address regional, rural-urban and gender disparities and design more targeted and effective poverty reduction strategies aligned with its 2030 poverty reduction goals.

UNDP promoted the use and application of the local and National Multidimensional Poverty Index (N-MPI), which can be a powerful tool for measuring three dimensions: health, education and the standard of living that can support evidence-based policymaking at all levels, and marks a departure from traditional income-based measures.⁶⁰ This contribution of UNDP was highly relevant for Uzbekistan, given the country's ambition to reduce the poverty rate by 7 percent by 2030. As a result of this contribution, Uzbekistan initiated a pilot project on measuring N-MPI in 2022 and 2023, in collaboration with UNDP, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UNICEF and Innocenti, to comprehensively analyse the breadth and depth of poverty, including child-specific indicators. The findings of this exercise revealed substantial regional, rural-urban and gender disparities in multidimensional poverty.⁶¹ This pilot played a crucial role in raising awareness among state governments, academia, civil society and the public about the value of multidimensional poverty measures as both a powerful policy instrument and a mechanism to measure progress. Notably, the Government started incorporating N-MPI into its policymaking processes, using national and local MPI data to identify and address the root causes of poverty. This data-driven approach helped the Government to design targeted social protection policies and poverty reduction strategies by considering factors like education, health, living standards and employment.

Finding 16. UNDP laid the groundwork for incorporating inclusive and disaster risk insurance into national legislation, sectoral development strategies, institutional frameworks and public financial management systems.

⁶⁰ UNDP (2024) Funding Windows: Annual Report 2023.

⁶¹ UNDP (2024) Uzbekistan Pilot Multidimensional Poverty Index Report. Poverty and deprivation analysis using the Multidimensional Poverty Index.

Building on the foundational work of UNDP, a joint initiative with the Tashkent State Economic University made significant strides in integrating inclusive and disaster risk insurance into national legislation, sectoral development strategies, institutional frameworks and public financial management. By addressing systemic challenges such as inadequate policies, limited State financial support and low consumer awareness and trust, UNDP laid robust groundwork for improving the insurance sector. It also incorporated gender considerations, applying the UNDP Gender Equality Seal to ensure that the differentiated impacts of risks on women and men were addressed. A notable achievement included the development of a regulation and action plan on inclusive insurance, crafted through close collaboration with national stakeholders including the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Emergency Situations. While these measures set the stage for greater market penetration and enhanced consumer trust, it was too early to assess their full impact.

In partnership with the University, UNDP launched a training centre in November 2023, to improve the skills of Uzbekistan's insurance professionals (and the overall capacity of the insurance market) through a "Train the Trainer" model. Feedback from senior managers of insurance companies indicated that UNDP support was crucial for the overall improvement of the insurance sector. While these initiatives were still in their early stages and full results were yet to be seen, respondents highlighted ongoing challenges, such as a shortage of actuaries, essential for effective risk management and tariff policy analysis in the insurance sector.

2.1.4 Sustainable energy and environment

Outcome 4: By 2025, most at-risk regions and communities of Uzbekistan are more resilient to climate change and disasters and benefit from increasingly sustainable and gender-sensitive efficient management of natural resources and infrastructure, robust climate action, inclusive environmental governance and protection.

Corresponding outputs:

Output 4.1: Innovative and sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives designed and implemented.

Output 4.2: Climate promise and NAP projects terrestrial and water ecosystems promoted through conservation policies.

Output 4.3: Integrated gender-responsive climate and disaster risk governance systems strengthened through enhanced multi-hazard early warning and rapid recovery.

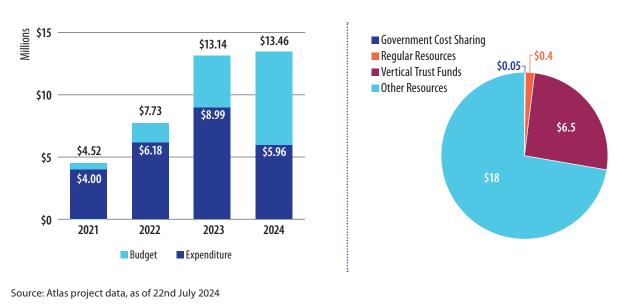
Output 4.4: Systems innovations advanced for integrated solutions in the Aral Sea region.

The 19 projects under Outcome 4 had a total budget of \$38.8 million, with expenditure of \$25.1 million by July 2024. Significant contributions came from Vertical Trust Funds (\$6.49 million) or Bilateral and Multilateral funds (\$3.2 million), with the majority of funding secured through other resources (\$14.95 million).

Figure 7 provides an overview of the budget allocated to Outcome 4. The slowed down delivery in the last two years was partly explained by the delays many projects experienced due to several factors, including government restructuring, challenges with two full NIM projects, high staff turnover, etc.

Outcome 4 addressed Uzbekistan's energy and environmental needs by supporting initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, enhance environmental protection, improve climate resilience and strengthen multi-hazard early warning systems (MHEWS). Most projects under Outcome 4 included a significant gender equality component and were implemented through NIM.

FIGURE 7. Budgeted amounts, expenditure and sources of funding in Outcome 4 in millions US\$



Finding 17. UNDP advanced the green agenda by supporting the development of key frameworks and policies for climate adaptation and emissions reduction, with implementation challenges due to capacity constraints and delayed reforms.

UNDP contributed to the advancement of the green agenda by supporting the development of the Green Growth Strategic Framework (2022), aligned with the country's roadmap for the 2019 National Green Transition Strategy. Key contributions included the development of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), the Enhanced NDC (with the inclusion of adaptation and more than tripling the targeted reduction in CO₂ emissions through enhanced energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy), and sectoral and regional adaption plans. These efforts were critical in addressing climate change, particularly in areas such as water, agriculture, emergency, health and buildings. Notably, UNDP supported the drafting of the Water Code, supported the sustainable cooling system through the National Programme for Complete Ozone-Depleting Substances Phase-out, and played a key role in shaping the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. UNDP programmatic response helped integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation through policy measures pursuing a long-term vision of green growth.

Despite these significant policy advancements, policy implementation lagged behind (as in the previous CPD) due to capacity constraints and high staff turnover in Government, and the lack of effective implementation mechanisms in many areas, despite significant efforts in capacity-building by UNDP and

other development partners. The achievement of energy efficiency goals faced several challenges, including the slow pace of implementing the announced removal of State subsidies for energy prices, affecting the achievement of some of the plans. ⁶² Other examples included the planned green mortgage scheme under the Sustainable Housing project, which was cancelled and replaced with a scheme to support renewable energy measures.

Finding 18. UNDP supported environmental sustainability by promoting water-saving technologies, enhancing biodiversity preservation, and strengthening disaster preparedness and early warning systems. Challenges related to scale up and sustainability remained in some cases.

UNDP advanced environmental sustainability by promoting the adoption of water-saving technologies and enhancing the integration of science and farming through the establishment of Innovative Groups in Agriculture, modelled on the EU approach. This led to the adoption of innovative, climate-resilient crops, techniques and water-saving technologies by farmers. These advancements were further scaled by a Presidential Decree, linked to the agricultural extension service, whereby several innovative adaptation measures were piloted, many of which were scaled up. In other examples of the replication of initiatives supported under the current CPD cycle: Agricultural Innovation Groups were replicated following a Presidential decree; the SMART Patrol System was adopted as a guidance for all protected areas; saxaul planting was replicated beyond the pilot zone of the Aral Seabed; the Community Development Plans pilot was extended under the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) loan project (but was not yet in the legislation); and environmental education initiatives from the Climate Box regional project were promoted by the Zamin Foundation.⁶³ Some challenges with scale up and sustainability were related to national capacities, but in some cases UNDP project designs did not sufficiently include elements to promote sustainability (e.g., training on a sustainable basis in the case of water specialists).

UNDP made significant contributions to biodiversity preservation. Protected areas were strengthened and expanded from 8 percent to 14 percent of Uzbek territory, with improved management plans and monitoring capacities. ⁶⁴ The BIOFIN (2021-2027) project supported this with innovative financing mechanisms. UNDP contributions also included forestation projects and support for national policies to conserve the snow leopard, the latter under the "Sustainable natural resource use and forest management in mountainous areas important for globally significant biodiversity" (2017-2022) project. This was part of a broader, regional effort to protect mountainous ecosystems from overexploitation as lower-altitude pastures and ecosystems were progressively degraded. While there were important achievements in terms of snow leopard preservation, sustainable mechanisms for mountainous pasture management were lacking.

UNDP helped strengthen the country's MHEWS by supporting improved hydrometeorological monitoring and disaster preparedness. This included substantively expanded automated agro- and meteorological stations (scaled up by the Government), innovative impact modelling, risk analysis, improved location-specific forecasts and effective community awareness, including a mobile app. There were several complementary initiatives, including a regional project to address the legacy of uranium and a sovereign risk transfer scheme consisting of a multi-peril indemnity insurance product to protect climate-vulnerable

In May 2022, the Ministries of Finance, Economic Development and Poverty Reduction and Energy jointly made the case for further reforms in the electricity and gas sectors, citing interruptions in electricity supply, and developed a draft resolution suggesting raising tariffs closer to market price levels from 2023 and to full cost recovery levels by 2026. In parallel, the Government and the World Bank signed an agreement in 2023 to allocate \$46.25 million for financing the Innovative Carbon Resource Application for Energy Transition Project supporting the country's clean energy transition, energy efficiency and energy subsidy reforms.

⁶³ UNDP (2024) Climate Box: Thinking Out-of-the-Box for Climate Education: https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/press-releases/climate-box-thinking-out-box-climate-education

A new mountainous protected area was established within Pamir Alay SL landscape with an area of 27,851 ha. and a new core zone of Ugam-Chatkal State National Park was mapped with an area of 51,300 ha.

farmers in Uzbekistan. The early warning system was linked to improvements in addressing water conflicts, which was very important in the context of highly complex and interlinked water-energy interdependencies among Central Asian countries. Communities in the Fergana Valley learned how to solve disputes caused by the lack of natural resources with the help of mediation.⁶⁵

UNDP strongly prioritized development financing, supporting: i) climate budget tagging practices to better monitor and track the country's national development and green priorities; ii) the issuance of the first ever SDG bond and Green Sovereign Eurobonds worth approximately \$328 million on the London Stock Exchange;⁶⁶ iii) the introduction of INFF; iv) a feasibility study into Islamic banking in Uzbekistan; v) the Futures and Foresight exercise on Green Transition in Uzbekistan; vi) the establishment of a crowdfunding platform for the Aral Sea; and vii) the government establishment of a subsidy mechanism for renewable energy sources introduced under the "Market Transformation for Sustainable Rural Housing in Uzbekistan" project. Two more major projects were about to start.⁶⁷ Respondents saw room for improvement in raising awareness of the existing green financing mechanisms for renewable energy among entrepreneurs to enable them to access these subsidized schemes.

Finding 19. UNDP strongly contributed to making Uzbekistan's most at-risk regions (especially the Aral Sea) and communities more resilient to climate change and disasters, through policies and projects on the ground. This progress aligned with a growing emphasis on a Just Transition, indicating a commitment to fostering equitable and sustainable development.

The strong presence of UNDP in the Aral region illustrated its long-standing programmatic commitment to support the most vulnerable communities. In collaboration with other development partners, UNDP played a pivotal role in transforming the Aral Sea region into a hub for innovation. UNDP successfully promoted the whole-of-the society/systems approach to problems in Aral Sea region, by addressing environmental, economic and social issues geared towards increasing resilience. This was achieved through several initiatives, which set ambitious goals for the green agenda and adaptation. The mechanism of "small grants" was not entirely sustainable, however, as these were not mainstreamed into the financial plans and programmes of local governments. The "Developing climate resilience of farming communities in the drought-prone parts of Uzbekistan" project (2014-2021), in the Aral region, improved institutional and technical hydrometeorological capacity for drought management and early warning, established climate-resilient practices on subsistence farms and implemented soil conservation measures consistent with improved climate resilience. Several other projects holistically supported the social, economic and environmental needs of communities. To put these on a sustainable footing, UNDP supported the development of the Integrated Roadmap for SDGs in the Aral Sea region for 2022-2026.⁶⁸ In another example, UNDP contributed to improved livelihoods and a safer environment through support to communities suffering from the uranium legacy.

Uzbekistan's climate change and green growth strategies set a new course towards greater efficiency in natural resource use and reduced carbon intensity across the economy. Under the recent Just Transition initiative, launched as this report was being prepared, UNDP partnered with the Government of Uzbekistan

⁶⁵ UNDP (2023) Residents of the Fergana Valley learned how to solve disputes caused by the lack of natural resources with the help of mediation: https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/press-releases/residents-fergana-valley-learned-how-solve-disputes-caused-lack-natural-resources-help-mediation

⁶⁶ UNDP (2023) Uzbekistan Issues First Ever Green Sovereign Eurobonds Worth 4.25 trillion Uzbek soms on the London Stock Exchange: https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/press-releases/uzbekistan-issues-first-ever-green-sovereign-eurobonds-worth-425-trillion-uzs-london-stock-exchange

⁶⁷ UNDP (2024) AFD, EU and UNDP join efforts to support green financing in Uzbekistan: https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/press-releases/afd-european-union-and-undp-join-efforts-support-green-financing-uzbekistan. Insurance Development Forum (2024) 'Public-Private Partnership Launched to Develop Agriculture Insurance Scheme in Uzbekistan. Press Release': https://www.insdevforum.org/press-release-public-private-partnership-launched-to-develop-agriculture-insurance-scheme-in-uzbekistan/

⁶⁸ United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Aral Sea region declared the Aral Sea region a zone of ecological innovations and technologies at the 75th session on May 18, 2021.

and the World Bank to identify six priorities for transitioning to a green economy, including "Support for the people and places most impacted by the transition." These green transition efforts aimed to enhance the resilience of the Uzbekistan economy, which is highly vulnerable to climate change and increasing water stress—risks that are no longer distant but imminent. However, additional targeted efforts were needed to ensure that the benefits of the transition were sustainable and inclusive for all. UNDP contributed to these goals through projects in vulnerable communities, support for green financing and subsidy schemes and assistance to at-risk residents in developing alternative livelihoods. UNDP also emphasized GEWE, alongside research into measures to support vulnerable populations if energy subsidies were removed. This recent emphasis on a Just Transition, in collaboration with the Istanbul Regional Hub, indicated a strengthened focus on inclusive green growth moving forward.

2.2 Overall performance and cross-cutting issues

2.2.1 Partnerships

Finding 20. In alignment with the Partnership Strategy outlined in the Partnership and Communication Plan 2021-2025, UNDP Uzbekistan successfully expanded its national and international partnerships.

One significant change in the cycle under review was the successful expansion of the country office partnership scope. Collaboration with international agencies grew substantially, with newly initiated projects funded by USAID, EU, the United Kingdom and South Korea, focusing on the rule of law and gender. The country office effectively leveraged support from Finland and South Korea in the areas of good governance and human rights, as well as from Japan and Russia in the environmental sector. Additionally, partnerships with IFIs were strengthened, for example the IsDB-UNDP Green Sukuk sustainable rural development initiative.

At project level, UNDP collaborated with various United Nations agencies contributing to notable outcomes. The partnership with WHO, for instance, contributed to enhancing public health insurance mechanisms and financing models, and cooperation with UNICEF implemented targeted training programmes which successfully integrated child-sensitive approaches into public financial management and strengthened child-sensitive budget analysis. Partnership with FAO played a significant role in promoting innovative partnerships in science and agriculture. In the Aral Sea region, joint projects involving UNICEF, FAO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (with funding from the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region in Uzbekistan) demonstrated a comprehensive, whole-of-system approach to sustainable development. The country office reported that this contributed to joint efforts of the United Nations country team to provide clean drinking water, electricity and enhanced health facilities for rural residents of Karakalpakstan.

Given the successful implementation of B&HR by UNDP globally, and in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, and partnerships with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, UNDP Uzbekistan was well positioned to integrate B&HR into its governance portfolio.⁶⁹ This was particularly timely as the country opened up to foreign investment and businesses. Establishing direct linkages and result reporting across other prospective CPD outcomes further strengthened UNDP impact in the region.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ UNDP currently has field programmes on B&HR in 39 countries: https://www.undp.org/rolhr/business-and-human-rights. For information on B&HR in Kyrgyzstan see: https://www.undp.org/kyrgyzstan/projects/business-and-human-rights

VINDP (2023) 'The status of the Implementation of the UNGPs on Business and Human Rights in Europe and Central Asia, Scoping Study: https://www.undp.org/rolhr/business-and-human-rights

Finding 21. The country office successfully collaborated with various United Nations agencies to address the country's development challenges and advance the SDGs, and there were opportunities for deeper joint efforts to support the Government on complex development issues affecting vulnerable populations.

A notable example of this collaboration was the United Nations Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan, where UNDP, UNICEF and the International Labour Organization worked together to enhance the country's social protection system. This programme led to significant achievements, including the development of a National Strategy for Social Protection and the implementation of a Single Registry of Social Protection, which expanded social protection coverage to over 1.2 million vulnerable individuals.⁷¹ UNFPA also led joint initiatives to support the development of the necessary by-laws and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to guide and monitor the work of shelters for GBV survivors, pending nationwide adoption by the Government.

UNDP was instrumental in aligning the efforts of local partners, organizations of people living with HIV and United Nations agencies to support people living with HIV and not receiving necessary treatment. In January 2024, Uzbekistan had 48,658 people living with HIV, with 84.4 percent receiving treatment. Through comprehensive programmes, UNDP improved access to healthcare, promoted social inclusion and worked to reduce stigma and discrimination. In collaboration with national and international partners, UNDP implemented initiatives providing essential services, education and empowerment opportunities for people living with HIV, enhancing their quality of life and ensuring their active participation in society. These efforts demonstrated the impact of UNDP work with other United Nations agencies in addressing complex and multifaceted development challenges. Moving forward, there is significant potential for UNDP to expand its partnerships with relevant United Nations agencies, particularly in addressing issues related to marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as people living with HIV.

Finding 22. While UNDP engaged with non-state actors to promote SDG financing and innovative climate adaptation solutions, collaborations with the private sector and CSOs remained limited and narrow in scope.

The Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy highlights the expansion of civil society as a State priority, offering a strategic opportunity for UNDP to enhance engagement with CSOs. Partnerships with women's CSOs and other stakeholders were strengthened to advance gender equality, and collaborations were established with: Tashkent Agrarian University to foster innovative adaptation solutions; Tashkent State Economic University to strengthen professional development in the insurance industry; the NGO Ecolog for environmental journalism; and the Zamin Foundation for environmental education. Collaboration with the Uzbek Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System linked scientific research institutions and private farmers to promote agricultural extension services. At local level, community-based social and economic development initiatives resulted in the gradual regaining of a sense of ownership and self-reliance by local communities. Climate resilient community development planning tools developed and applied in pilot communities under the Aral and IsDB loan project ensured strong partnerships between communities, civil society and local authorities, but these partnerships were not engraved in the legislation.

73 Ibid.

⁷¹ United Nations in Uzbekistan (2021) Joint United Nations-Uzbekistan Achievements in Strengthening the Social Protection System Discussed. https://uzbekistan.un.org/en/166036-joint-un-uzbekistan-achievements-strengthening-social-protection-system-discussed

VINDP (2024) Combating HIV/AIDS in Uzbekistan: A UNDP-Led Endeavour. https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/blog/combating-hiv/aids-uzbekistan-undp-led-endeavor

The Call Umida initiative was an example of a partnership with the private sector and CSOs to establish a unique mechanism to protect women from street harassment. The initiative included an awareness campaign and a network of safe locations providing immediate safety, access to emergency services and connections to CSOs for further assistance. The country office reported a significant milestone in May 2024, when a supermarket chain with 118 locations joined the Call Umida initiative, bringing the total number of verified locations in Tashkent to 307. These businesses confirmed their commitment by displaying Call Umida stickers and integrating regular and monthly refresher training for frontline staff. Random checks by UNDP and volunteers assessed staff awareness, and non-compliant locations were removed from the list and website. While some small businesses dropped out, medium-sized businesses maintained their involvement, participating in UNDP awareness-raising campaigns, including the 16 Days of Activism in 2023.

Despite their value, such collaborations with the private sector and CSOs were limited in scope, with limited attention to sustainability issues. There is no tradition of corporate social responsibility in Uzbekistan and independent civil society is fragile in terms of both legal status and capacity to manage substantial projects. The number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the country possessing the necessary capacity and expertise to effectively collaborate with international and national partners was limited compared to the rapidly evolving development context and the need to include such important actors.

Finding 23. UNDP successfully fostered strong national ownership in NIM projects, though full-NIM projects faced operational delays and challenges, while supported NIM projects encountered issues with co-funding and administrative changes.

Four of the 19 national projects were DIM and the rest were NIM, of which two were "full-NIM" - namely Tashkent Accelerating Investments in Low-Emission Vehicles and Aral-Wetlands. The existence of full-NIM projects reflected country office efforts to strengthen national ownership, although both encountered operational challenges, including major delays in disbursements and hiring of project staff and other challenges, linked to operations and compliance (e.g., internal systems of clearance procurements). These delays affected the achievement of planned results and, in the case of the Tashkent project, opportunities for linkages with national development plans were likely missed. This also raised questions about the future application and sustainability of any potential plans for full-NIM projects.

Supported NIM projects showed strong indications of national ownership and interest, with a few exceptions. For example, support for the government co-funded Yashil Makon Forestation project diminished during implementation due to institutional instability. More broadly, starting in 2020, the Ministry of Finance implemented a new reporting system requiring national and donor funds to be presented to Parliament, with the potential for budget revisions, which impacted projects such as Developing Climate Resilience of Farming Communities in the Drought-Prone Parts of Uzbekistan.

NIM DIM 17 Outcome 1 ■ N/A Outcome 2 Outcome 3 Outcome 4 13 Global/Regional 0 5 10 15 20 25

FIGURE 8. Implementation modalities by outcome

2.2.2 Responsiveness to the national institutional environment

Finding 24. Following administrative reform that resulted in merging ministries and staff restructuring, there were some adjustments to institutional processes. 74 While these changes caused brief delays, UNDP successfully navigated the transition by maintaining proactive engagement and open communication, and regularly aligning project priorities through high-level meetings with national partners.

Staff turnover in national partner organizations disrupted project continuity and effectiveness under all CPD outcomes. Frequent restructuring and consolidation of ministries resulted in resource reallocations and changes in institutional mandates, creating additional hurdles for UNDP to navigate bureaucratic channels and secure necessary approvals and partnerships. Delayed projects often resulted in no-cost extensions, requiring alternative resources (UNDP TRAC or other funding sources) to cover staff costs and, in several cases, led to significant modifications to the project design.

UNDP addressed these challenges by maintaining active engagement and constant communication with national partners and high-level meetings to align project priorities with government needs. In most cases, UNDP successfully overcame operational challenges that arose. For instance, under Outcome 2, the joint UNDP and IsDB initiative on Green Sukuk faced delays in 2023 due to administrative reforms that restructured the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The proposed green and gender-focused investment fund was postponed until the necessary regulatory framework, legislative acts and supporting ecosystem were in place. UNDP continued collaborating closely with the Government to establish the implementation mechanisms, financing structures and resource mobilization required to advance the project.

Uzbekistan's administrative reforms, initiated under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev starting in 2016, involved significant restructuring of government bodies. Major reforms occurred in 2017 and 2020, where ministries were merged and new ones were created to streamline governance and improve efficiency. These changes were part of broader efforts to modernize the public administration and enhance economic and social development.

2.2.3 Resource mobilization

Finding 25. The country office made notable progress in implementing the resource mobilization strategy outlined in the Partnership and Communication Strategy and the Action Plan 2021-2025.

The strongest funding trend was the steady growth of the share of funding for Outcome 4 (see Figure 9), which accounted for 20 percent of the total budget in 2021 and 50 percent by 2024. A combination of factors contributed to this, as donor preferences increasingly shifted towards climate change mitigation, adaptation and other aspects of environmental sustainability, and vertical funds dedicated to climate change became available, unlike in other thematic areas. Coupled with the significant challenges posed by climate change and the success of the country office in resource mobilization, this led to a strong focus on climate-related initiatives. In Outcome 4, efforts were made to optimize financial resources, particularly for the Aral Sea projects, managed by the team in Nukus. However, similar efforts were not observed under other outcomes and the country office structure only partly enabled joint programming efforts.

UNDP took a central role in the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund, a United Nations initiative aimed at achieving the SDGs in Uzbekistan by 2030.⁷⁵ The Fund promoted transparent and effective asset restitution, supporting the country's reform agenda and SDG progress. UNDP aimed to raise \$14 million towards the \$20 million budget for a joint proposal with UNICEF, approved by the Project Appraisal Committee, to strengthen institutional capacity within key ministries, provide anti-corruption training, enhance fraud detection and establish an integrity pact in collaboration with Transparency International.

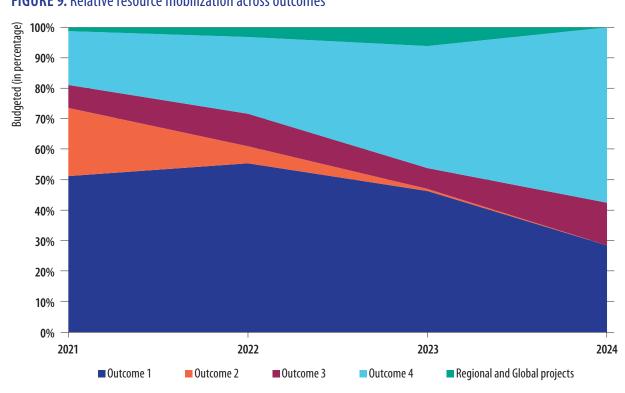


FIGURE 9. Relative resource mobilization across outcomes

United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund. Accessed January 2025: https://mptf.undp.org/fund/uzb00

Funding sources included the EU, Japan and Russia, IsDB, the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund and the Government. These partnerships reflected UNDP strategy to leverage diverse funding sources. To align with Uzbekistan's lower middle-income status and the changing donor landscape, UNDP prioritized government financing and strengthened partnerships with IFIs and development banks. This approach supported reforms and fostered innovative public and private financing for the SDGs.

2.2.4 Results-based management and M&E

Finding 26. The establishment of a detailed M&E system enabled better integration of international indices and State statistics, providing a more robust mechanism for tracking progress and evaluating effectiveness. While progress was made, application of the M&E system was inconsistent, resulting in uneven effectiveness across different projects and limiting the capacity to obtain uniform and comprehensive evaluation results.

Outcome-level monitoring was achieved by reporting against the United Nations Joint Work Plan targets and the national SDG indicator framework. This framework was crucial for tracking the outcomes and outputs established in the UNSDCF. Annual reporting through the ROAR process involved collecting and analysing data from relevant clusters and projects. This data was based on observed and/or recorded facts, verified by external sources to ensure reliability.

In terms of monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning systems, the country office made commendable efforts to maximize impact despite limited resources. A single staff member managed these responsibilities, at times also taking on the role of Gender Focal Point due to budgetary constraints that delayed the hiring of a dedicated gender specialist. Nonetheless, the country office maintained a solid foundation in these areas, with evaluation activities conducted from 2021 to 2024 providing valuable insights and contributing to continuous improvement.

Over 20 decentralized evaluations were completed between 2021 and 2024, including six in 2024, with an additional four scheduled for completion in coming months. However, many projects did not undergo any external evaluation. Outcome 4 had the highest number of evaluations, largely due to the projects funded by vertical funds, which imposed strict M&E guidelines. Projects funded by bilateral donors had less stringent results frameworks, especially with regard to outcome monitoring and requirements for independent evaluations.

Monthly programme meetings were used to share lessons and facilitate peer-to-peer learning, fostering a culture of continuous improvement in practice. The ROAR tool enabled further reflection on challenges, lessons learned and necessary corrective actions. Project and outcome monitoring was facilitated using specific indicators linked directly to CPD outputs and outcomes. Risk management was integrated into the M&E strategy, with annual reviews at strategic programme level and semi-annual reviews at project level, updating the risk log as needed. Thematic surveys and research were conducted to inform strategic planning and adaptive management, responding to socioeconomic changes. Various M&E activities allowed for tracking progress towards results sustainably, with periodic evaluations ensuring alignment with goals and objectives.

⁷⁶ UNDP IEO (2024) Current Evaluation Plan 2021-2025 – Uzbekistan: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/units/233

2.2.5 Gender

Finding 27. UNDP Uzbekistan played a leading role in advancing the national gender equality agenda by incorporating a gender-sensitive approach in the implementation of the CPD and through strategic collaborations with national partners.

During this CPD cycle, the Government of Uzbekistan made significant legislative advances in GEWE, with substantial contributions from UNDP. UNDP collaborative efforts with the Government were instrumental in the adoption of a new law criminalizing GBV and the establishment of the National Women Leaders Caucus, which united 185 women leaders from various sectors. This Caucus was part of a broader regional initiative, implemented with the support of United Nations agencies across Central Asia. Many respondents noted that Uzbekistan had the most dynamic engagement in the initiative, demonstrating strong national ownership and proactive engagement in promoting gender equality across the region, consistently supported by the UNDP country office.

Some significant contributions in this area were the successful advocacy for the criminalization of IPV, and the development of a comprehensive gender perspective across various thematic areas, e.g., STEM education and employment; the environment and inclusive communication.⁷⁷ The adoption of pivotal laws such as the "Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women" and the "Law on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" was a significant step towards gender equality in Uzbekistan with the potential to positively impact gender equality efforts across the region. These laws were enacted through strategic advocacy, lobbying and targeted gender programmes supported by UNDP, in close collaboration with the Parliament of Uzbekistan. The country office facilitated the development of a unified methodology for data collection on women's socioeconomic participation and the proportion of women in decision-making positions in all government agencies and organizations. Support was extended for policy recommendations to tackle gender bias and stereotypes and prevent GBV, though barriers to concrete progress persist and measuring the real impact of legislative change remains difficult.

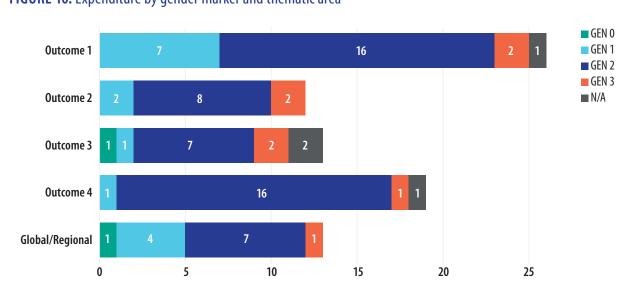


FIGURE 10. Expenditure by gender marker and thematic area

VINDP Uzbekistan Acceleration Lab (2023) Social and psychological determinants of behavioural changes in girls and women in STEM education and STEM employment.

Under Outcome 4, UNDP mainstreamed gender into many of the policies and systems developed with its support, including the Enhanced NDC, the NAP and MHEWS. With guidance from the global UNDP Nature, Climate, Energy and Waste team, the country office improved its procedures for mainstreaming gender into energy and environment programming. Several projects supported women's empowerment with grants for startups (EU Agrin), farm management (two joint Aral projects), community infrastructure (two joint Aral projects and Uranium Legacy). While these contributed to sustainable improvements in the enabling environment and ecosystem, evidence suggests that the grant mechanism itself was not sustainable as it was largely donor-driven and not mainstreamed into local government budgeting processes. The country office actively worked to address this situation and was in the process of designing a technical assistance facility for a new women's economic empowerment fund, in collaboration with the Government.

Finding 28. UNDP efforts helped to advance gender equality goals, increasing women's participation in the economy, digitalization and environment. However, it was too early to access the macro-level (transformative) results of UNDP GEWE interventions overall.

The multifaceted approach of UNDP combined economic empowerment initiatives with legislative support, capacity-building and advocacy to strengthen GEWE in the national economy. Respondents claimed that programmes offering vocational training and entrepreneurship support contributed to reducing gender disparities in employment and business ownership. Another significant area of support was for women's economic empowerment and access to financial services, through the provision of loans and insurance tailored to women's needs. UNDP-supported education and training initiatives improved the skills and education of women and girls. For example, UNDP supported the Ministry of Digital Economy and the IT Park, to establish regional training centres, especially targeting young people and focusing on digital skills.⁷⁸ The objective was to reach around 10,000 direct beneficiaries, at least 50 percent women, and 25 percent from rural areas. Training covered aspects of e-commerce, the digital economy and the English language. UNDP country office activities in 2022 and 2023 reached a total of 11,694 beneficiaries across six individual initiatives, surpassing initial targets, but sex-disaggregated data were unavailable.

Several individual success stories were reported and shared by respondents, as well as some results in terms of job creation, particularly in opening digital opportunities for young women and girls in rural areas. UNDP reported at least 50 permanent new jobs were created through support delivered by "Aid for Trade IV". This catalysed economic growth opportunities in rural areas, particularly benefiting women engaged in the agricultural and food processing industries. Thus, UNDP efforts created pathways towards a more inclusive and supportive environment for women's economic participation and leadership. At the same time, it was too early to speak of structural and transformative changes, with continued barriers to women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields like STEM, law enforcement, agriculture, environment and energy.

Finding 29. UNDP made notable progress in gender equality in CPD activities, with 85 percent of the 2022 budget allocated to gender-sensitive projects, surpassing targets. However, improvements were needed in comprehensive gender analysis, transformative interventions and alignment with gender equality objectives and gender focus across projects.

⁷⁸ IT Park is a complex of facilities, buildings and structures for startup and market access, a free economic zone for IT companies, integrated with scientific and educational organizations: https://it-park.uz/en/itpark/about

UNDP (2023) Transforming the future of agri-business in Uzbekistan by empowering women entrepreneurs: https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/stories/transforming-future-agri-business-uzbekistan-empowering-women-entrepreneurs Success stories were also confirmed in interviews with beneficiaries.

UNDP (2023) Women Entrepreneurs as Role Models for Economic Growth within Green Value Chains: https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/press-releases/women-entrepreneurs-role-models-economic-growth-within-green-value-chains

The 2023 Gender Review of the UNDP Uzbekistan programme portfolio concluded that gender equality was well mainstreamed in the country programme, which consisted predominantly of GEN2 projects. Furthermore, the country office exceeded expectations regarding the allocation of resources towards gender equality objectives, with 85 percent of the 2022 budget allocated to projects classified as GEN2 and GEN3, against a 70 percent minimum requirement.⁸¹ However, some projects rated as GEN2 did not fully meet the criteria, lacking comprehensive gender analysis, gender-responsive strategies, or focused outputs. In response to recommendations from the Review, the gender marker was upgraded for two projects, reflecting their numerous gender-responsive and transformative outcomes.

The findings of this ICPE aligned with the Gender Review, noting that while the country office had a strong gender portfolio, it did not fully capitalize on opportunities to implement transformative gender-specific interventions (GEN3 projects). UNDP could strengthen the gender-sensitive formulation of CPD outputs and enhance the development of indicators to more effectively measure gender-related impacts. For example, under Outcome 4 only half of the outputs were formulated in a gender-sensitive way and there was a modest number of gender indicators in the CPD results framework.⁸² There was also an inconsistent gender focus across different outputs and indicators, weakening the overall impact on gender equality. For example, apart from the feasibility study for a green and gender-focused Investment Fund in Uzbekistan, the programme "Financing for Sustainable Development in Uzbekistan" did not systematically address the specific needs of women and men. None of the targets had an explicit focus on gender or GEWE.⁸³ This indicates gaps in gender integration.

The current project portfolio did not fully demonstrate alignment with the CPD and Gender Equality Strategy objectives, impacting the effectiveness of gender equality efforts. While there were efforts made to strengthen gender responsiveness, the Gender Review identified the need for better alignment and enhanced monitoring. The country office reported that, following the Gender Review, significant progress was made and that the project pipeline was fully aligned with the CPD, with each project contributing to both the CPD objectives and the Gender Strategy.

2.2.6 Leave No One Behind

Finding 30. The country office effectively integrated Leave No One Behind (LNOB) and a human rights-based approach into its landmark projects. There was potential to further enhance inclusivity and accessibility, especially across regional initiatives, by increasing expert involvement and refining design and implementation processes.

In addressing the needs of vulnerable populations in climate-affected regions, UNDP concentrated efforts in high-risk areas. Notably, six projects targeted the Aral Sea area, which was severely impacted by environmental and socioeconomic challenges, and other interventions were focused on the Surkhandarya and Ferghana valleys - regions vulnerable to climate change and water stress, with Ferghana also being a transboundary area prone to water conflicts. The absence of a comprehensive and targeted country office LNOB strategy and mapping left significant gaps in inclusivity across UNDP programmes. Although improvements in Social and Environmental Standards were beneficial, they did not fully address these gaps. A more focused approach involving expert input, collaborative engagement and thorough assessments was crucial, as efforts in LNOB were less robust compared to gender equality initiatives.

Alla Skvortova (2023) UNDP Uzbekistan Country Office Portfolio Review from a Gender Perspective (Oct. 2022 – Feb. 2023).

⁸² Ibid

UNDP (2023) Financing for Sustainable Development in Uzbekistan. Final Project Review Report.

UNDP was instrumental in supporting the inclusion of PWD in Uzbekistan. Key achievements included promoting the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of PWD and assisting in the development of a National Action Plan for its implementation. UNDP conducted accessibility assessments of public service centres, developed guidelines for social services for PWD, and focused on empowering women and girls with disabilities through training and small grants. One of the significant achievements of this implementation was the enactment of a "one-window" system for public services, which was assessed and influenced by perspectives from PWDs, showcasing an effort to consider accessibility in public service delivery. UNDP also worked to improve access to justice for vulnerable groups, including through legal aid, specialized training for legal professionals and the promotion of inclusive legal services. These efforts aligned with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, reaffirming UNDP commitment to mainstreaming disability inclusion in its programmes.

The direct beneficiaries of these projects suggested that PWD were actively included in the implementation process for the first time in the cycle under the review, demonstrating a progressive step towards inclusivity. However, such an approach was not applied across all CPD implementation: there was minimal engagement between UNDP and PWD CSOs, despite the existence of a Memorandum of Understanding, and the absence of PWD involvement in the design and planning phases of landmark projects. Respondents pointed out that as such projects moved into subsequent phases, the inclusivity and collaboration needed for meaningful participation was still insufficient.

UNDP implemented several projects involving Afghan beneficiaries, integrating a human rights-based approach by providing education, vocational training and economic empowerment opportunities to build local capacity across borders. These initiatives, such as the Empowerment of Afghan Women and Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training projects,⁸⁷ initially aimed for Afghan participants to return to their communities with valuable skills. However, political changes in Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power shifted the priorities and needs of these beneficiaries. Many Afghans, particularly women, faced increased risks, making repatriation unsafe and leaving them without secure legal status in Uzbekistan. The absence of refugee protection frameworks in Uzbekistan further complicated UNDP efforts to safeguard these individuals, highlighting the need for a responsive strategy to ensure their safety and uphold their rights.

After ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on June 7, 2021, Uzbekistan adopted a joint resolution on December 19, 2022, outlining a national action plan for implementing the Convention from 2023 to 2025.

Project Transformation of Social Service Delivery: Implementing a Human Rights-Based Approach for Children, Youth and Women with Disabilities in Uzbekistan. The Joint Programme is implemented by four United Nations Agencies: UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and OHCHR.

⁶⁶ Community Projects: Component B of Sustainable Rural Development project: Engineering Services and Capacity Building in Infrastructure Management.

⁸⁷ These projects are funded by the EU and include Phase I and II of Phase 2: Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This chapter presents the conclusions of the evaluation of the performance and contributions of UNDP to development results in Uzbekistan, as well as the recommendations and the management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. UNDP initiatives in Uzbekistan contributed to good governance, economic empowerment, the modernization of public service systems, sustainable energy and environmental sustainability, all in good alignment with government priorities.

UNDP strategically advanced multiple national priorities in Uzbekistan, demonstrating significant impact in anti-corruption, digitalization, inclusivity and environmental sustainability, demonstrating its ability to drive significant impact across various domains. In anti-corruption, UNDP was instrumental in developing frameworks and fostering strategic partnerships, and reinforcing transparency and accountability within governance systems, building a stronger foundation for improved public trust. The country office effectively integrated climate change adaptation into national strategies, advanced water conservation and promoted renewable energy solutions. UNDP initiatives, including the establishment of MHEWS and enhancements in chemical regulation and regional biodiversity efforts, particularly addressing the Aral Sea crisis and uranium legacy sites, reflected the strategic approach of UNDP to holistic environmental sustainability.

UNDP made substantial progress in the digitalization of public services, notably in health, demonstrating a strategic commitment to bridging digital access gaps. UNDP focused on economic empowerment through targeted training programmes for women and youth, enhancing service delivery and empowering marginalized groups. These initiatives highlighted its strategic adaptability and effective response to constraints, delivering substantial and meaningful impact.

The implementation cycle faced significant structural, political and economic challenges beyond the control of the country office, affecting the full integration of governance improvements and political support for key initiatives. These challenges impacted the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, legal aid and the economic empowerment of women, underscoring the need for continued strategic focus and adaptation to sustain and enhance outcomes.

Conclusion 2. Strengthening cross-outcome and cross-sector linkages, and the inclusion of Strategic Enablers, presented a valuable opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of CPD implementation, but such efforts were limited, underscoring the need for a more integrated approach.

UNDP made important progress in areas such as anti-corruption, environmental sustainability, employment creation, digitalization and general SDG integration across the portfolio, but there were opportunities to create stronger connections across different programme outcomes. Without fully integrating efforts, particularly between sustainable energy, environmental governance and resilience-building initiatives, the potential for more cohesive and impactful results was reduced. Similarly, gender equality and digitalization projects could have benefited from better collaboration and knowledge sharing. Going forward, a more integrated approach will help maximize impact and ensure the long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

In terms of the Strategic Enablers—digitalization, innovation and development finance—UNDP made progress but lacked holistic strategies and prioritization mechanisms to fully accelerate and scale results. Digitalization showed promise, particularly for women, youth and rural populations, but faced hurdles related to limited infrastructure and digital literacy. Furthermore, local innovations that aligned with both digital and green agendas showed promise, but were largely pilot-scale projects, raising concerns about

their long-term viability. Many of these initiatives remained heavily reliant on continuous financial support, which could undermine their sustainability if not addressed with a more robust and integrated strategy for scaling and embedding them within broader development frameworks.

Conclusion 3. Despite progress in engaging civil society and enhancing the LNOB approach in the ongoing CPD, NGO/CSO engagement remained limited and fragmented across sectors, and the lack of involvement of vulnerable beneficiaries in project design affected both the design and implementation of the rights-based approach and the sustainability of the results achieved.

Civil society in Uzbekistan was evolving, and legislation introduced in 2023 presented challenges. Despite efforts by the country office to increase civil society partnerships, the overall strategy for engaging CSOs in CPD implementation was insufficient. In Uzbekistan, where civil society faces numerous challenges, United Nations agencies needed to move, where possible, beyond a focus on small (low-value) grant schemes. A robust and comprehensive strategy was essential to support and sustain the development of CSOs, particularly in rural areas, ensuring their long-term growth.

In line with the recommendations of the 2019 ICPE, UNDP continued to invest in promoting access to and protection of the rights of the most vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan, but the design process of most projects was not sufficiently inclusive. Outreach to PWD, ethnic minorities and the Afghan population presented valuable opportunities for further enhancement and inclusivity. For PWD, this omission reduced the accessibility and relevance of infrastructure and digitalization projects. In the case of Afghan beneficiaries, a comprehensive exit strategy was urgently needed, considering ongoing geopolitical changes in their home country. This strategy should address their safety concerns and the ongoing instability in Afghanistan, ensuring that viable options for resettlement, legal protection or local integration are considered.

Conclusion 4. UNDP support contributed to progress in promoting GEWE and developing the capacity of public institutions and private entities to support gender equality, but challenges remain in addressing systemic barriers and scaling up initiatives implemented successfully at local level.

UNDP advanced GEWE in Uzbekistan by adopting a gender-sensitive approach and fostering strategic partnerships. Gender considerations were integrated into numerous policies and systems, resulting in improved access to public services, justice and education for women, especially in remote areas. UNDP advocacy efforts contributed to significant national achievements, including the criminalization of IPV and the establishment of consultative platforms at both national and regional levels.

Despite progress since 2020, including the replacement of restrictive lists of professions, women remained underrepresented in leadership and technical roles. Training initiatives for women in digital skills and entrepreneurship were successful at micro scale, but required upscaling. While support for women's businesses and improved community services in disadvantaged areas were positive steps, sustainability remained uncertain due to inconsistent government support. Initiatives like STEM education programmes for girls and research on gender and ecology demonstrated the State's strong commitment to GEWE. However, these efforts required scaling to achieve a broader and more sustained impact, including further research across all CPD areas. While providing grants to women-led businesses contributed to empowerment (e.g., under the energy and environment initiative), it was not a sustainable mechanism for achieving broader, long-term impact. Efforts to integrate gender responsiveness in policy implementation and innovative financing made strides, but inconsistencies persisted. Legislative support and advocacy promoted women's empowerment, but deep-rooted gender stereotypes and norms continued to pose barriers.

Uzbekistan adopted the "Foreign Agent Law" on August 8, 2023. This law regulates the activities of NGOs and individuals who receive foreign funding, imposing certain restrictions and requirements for registration.

UNDP support and advocacy contributed to legislative and policy advancements in the area of gender equality, though accurately measuring the outcomes of these initiatives remained challenging. The lack of a comprehensive system for generating disaggregated statistics to track progress across various demographic segments including sex and vulnerabilities, was a weakness also identified in the 2019 ICPE. This gap limited the ability of UNDP to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented policies and tailor future interventions to the areas of greatest need.

Conclusion 5. UNDP work in the energy and environment sector was strongly aligned with both national and international environmental targets, contributing significantly to their achievement and, in more general terms, to a Just Transition. There were valuable opportunities to further integrate governance elements, such as environmental justice and BH&R, as well as to enhance access to and availability of reliable environmental data.

UNDP made substantial progress in environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction, well aligned to the 2019 ICPE recommendations. Projects in climate change mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity preservation delivered tangible results, including strengthening the normative framework and building the capacity of key stakeholders. Many innovative pilot projects, particularly in climate-resilient agriculture and water-saving technologies, were successfully institutionalized, bridging scientific research with practical applications in the field.

However, some areas required further attention. UNDP achieved success in managing protected areas, but more effective strategies were needed for mountainous pasture management. The significant UNDP presence in the Aral Sea region promoted a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach, and the establishment of MHEWS linked to mediation for water conflicts in the Fergana Valley represented a notable achievement. Yet, efforts in energy efficiency were slowed by external factors, particularly ongoing energy tariff subsidies, which impeded progress, despite plans for their removal.

UNDP recognition of environmental justice in its programming marked a positive development, but greater emphasis on cross-outcome synergies was needed to bridge and promote environmental justice principles across multiple outcomes in the CPD. This could have enhanced synergy, complementarities and integrated approaches. The absence of support for strong legal frameworks and enforcement capacity left critical gaps in addressing the triple planetary crisis—climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss—through a justice-oriented lens. Further progress was needed to promote criminal law responses to serious environmental offenses. Support to efforts to combat environmental harm, which disproportionately affected marginalized groups and exacerbated existing inequalities, was not yet in place. Without a proactive focus on building national enforcement capacity and ensuring accountability for environmental crimes, the approach remained reactive and fell short of the comprehensive safeguards necessary to protect human rights and achieve long-term sustainability. Furthermore, greater focus was needed on the availability and accessibility of reliable environmental data across projects, critical for informed decision-making and ensuring the long-term sustainability of initiatives.

Conclusion 6: The country office formed strong partnerships at various levels, contributing to the national development agenda, but there was space for enhanced collaboration with United Nations agencies to deal with complex development issues affecting vulnerable populations.

⁸⁹ Details and discussion on the triple planetary crisis here: https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis

Collaborations with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, civil society and the private sector were well established and resulted in effective project implementation, driving successful initiatives in public health, child-sensitive budgeting, digitalization, green growth and support to vulnerable groups. Interaction with bilateral partners, such as Japan and Russia, increased, and there were new partnerships with IFIs, resulting in initiatives like the IsDB-UNDP Green Sukuk project. While the country office established a broad network of strategic partnerships with development actors active in the country, there were also significant opportunities to enhance collaboration with United Nations organizations, particularly in addressing complex development issues linked to the national context affecting vulnerable groups, including people living with HIV.

3.2 Recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.



UNDP should maintain the strategic focus of its interventions and continue its efforts to strengthen governance across all outcomes and ensure political support for sustainability.

UNDP must continue to prioritize effective governance and justice for all, aligning with the goals set out in the CPD. This focus includes the integration of governance systems across various sectors, ensuring a holistic approach. Fostering synergy within and between the thematic clusters will enhance the overall impact of UNDP interventions, creating a cohesive and effective strategy for governance and development in the country. By pursuing these actions, UNDP can effectively sustain its strategic focus and contribute to long-term improvements in governance.

The relevance of the green agenda is paramount and UNDP should sustain its commitment to this area, which resonates with the country's development objectives, government priorities and UNDP comparative advantage. By leveraging its comparative advantage, UNDP can facilitate economic growth and development and enhance the role of the private sector in economic development. It is equally important to secure political support for ongoing initiatives by developing robust exit strategies that ensure the sustainability of progress achieved with UNDP assistance.

With the gradual diversification of UNDP initiatives in the previous and ongoing CPDs, and the increased coverage of local initiatives and civil society actors, UNDP should increase efforts to link bottom-up approaches (e.g., citizen awareness of improvements in public service delivery, or local-level pilot initiatives) with top-down approaches to establish stronger enabling frameworks in key sectors.

Management response: Fully accepted.



UNDP is taking steps to integrate effective governance and justice for all across new programmes, particularly focusing on anti-corruption tools, legal needs assessment of vulnerable populations and access to justice, including persons with disabilities and GBV victims, performance-based budgeting, gender equality and women's empowerment measures. UNDP recognizes and prioritizes supporting the Government of Uzbekistan in transitioning to the green economy. UNDP will further streamline cross-portfolio synergies, adopt a multisectoral approach and strengthen governance approaches across the new CPD. This approach will be grounded in exploring further learning opportunities, experience sharing and knowledge building to develop a common approach to cross-cutting issues, adopting a results-based management framework and fostering collaboration across teams.

Recommendation 1 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Completion	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
	date		Comments	Status
1.1 Ensure that governance and justice for all is mainstreamed in the new Country Programme Document with specific indicators established to measure implementation success.	September 2025	Cluster Leads, Senior Management		
1.2 Organize at least one dialogue with private sector representatives to position UNDP as ESG Ambassador in Uzbekistan and track interest and participation rates.	December 2026	Programme Team, Senior Management		
1.3 Align the new CPD with the development priorities of the Government of Uzbekistan and secure early government endorsement to ensure sustainability.	September 2025	Cluster Leads, Senior Management		

RECOMMENDATION 2.



UNDP should accelerate its efforts to promote integrated, cross-sectoral solutions for enhanced outcomes aligned with UNDP global strategies.

UNDP should create stronger strategic linkages within and across thematic clusters, including fostering cross-sectoral learning on ongoing projects. Leveraging opportunities for synergy across governance, sustainable energy and environment and economic empowerment initiatives will enhance the coherence and impact of UNDP work, ultimately leading to more sustainable and equitable development outcomes. In particular, UNDP should focus on implementing the Just Transition, bringing together climate and governance (integrating approaches contributing to environmental justice, GEWE and enhanced transparency related to environmental data and information, building on, *inter alia*, the recently adopted national system of transparency in the transition to a "green" economy), climate and health (in the context of accelerating impacts of climate change and worsening air quality), ecosystems, biodiversity, climate and green growth (building on the Nature Pledge) and others.

Management response: Fully accepted. (



UNDP recognizes the importance of accelerating efforts to promote integrated, cross-sectoral solutions for enhanced development outcomes. Globally, UNDP established mechanisms to ensure alignment of country office initiatives with global strategies, linking project activities both to CPDs and the Strategic Plan. Country office initiatives locally are guided by Global Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion strategies along with other documents. The country office will further integrate global strategies and foster synergies across thematic clusters to maximize the impact and sustainability of ongoing projects.

Recommendation 2 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Completion	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
	date		Comments	Status
2.1 Adopt country office Knowledge Strategy and system in full alignment with global strategies, ensuring the mechanism for fostering cross-sectoral learning from on-going projects.	December 2025	Programme Team, Senior Management		
2.2 Expand programming to include at least one new initiative that intersects Environment, Governance and Economic Growth areas while focusing on just and inclusive green transition.	December 2026	Cluster Leads, Senior Management		

RECOMMENDATION 3.



UNDP should further explore and capitalize on funding opportunities within the next CPD cycle by fostering joint programmes with key United Nations agencies through the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund. This collaborative approach will help mobilize additional resources, amplify collective impact and advance the achievement of the SDGs in Uzbekistan.

UNDP should continue to utilize the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund to support the Government of Uzbekistan in critical areas aligned with UNDP comparative advantage. This fund, situated within the United Nations coordination framework, should be further leveraged to enhance synergies across United Nations entities, ensuring targeted support for key national priorities that advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNDP should expand its partnerships with relevant United Nations agencies that complement its core competencies, particularly in addressing complex development issues affecting marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as people living with HIV. This collaboration should focus on capacity-building, knowledge exchange and the design of tailored interventions that address both the immediate and structural needs of these groups.

UNDP should work closely with the broader United Nations family to initiate joint advocacy campaigns and capacity-building initiatives targeting complex and interlinked development issues. These efforts could include the co-design and implementation of training programmes for government officials and CSOs on international human rights standards, facilitated through joint United Nations frameworks to ensure coherent and coordinated support.

Management response: Partially accepted.



During the current CPD, UNDP has maintained the status of a leader in joint programming along with UNICEF in Uzbekistan. UNDP will continue capitalizing on the momentum and streamline cooperation with key United Nations agencies for joint programming through the Vision 2030 Fund (an ongoing collaboration is already happening with UNICEF). UNDP continues implementing joint programmes and initiatives with UNICEF, UNFPA, and OHCHR improving social services delivery for people with disabilities and works in close partnership with UNAIDS on addressing issues affecting people living with HIV in Uzbekistan.

Key action(s)	Completion	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
	date		Comments	Status
3.1 Under the next CPD, further strengthen UNDP engagement with United Nations agencies and develop proposals for joint programming under the relevant priority areas identified by the Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund.	December 2025	Cluster Leads, Senior Management		
3.2 Develop a concept note for Vision 2030 Fund addressing health issues affecting marginalized and vulnerable groups focusing on capacity-building, knowledge exchange and the design of tailored interventions that address both the immediate and structural needs of mentioned groups.	December 2025	EGC, ECA, Senior Management		
3.3 Ensure that the new Country Programme (2026-2030) is fully aligned with the UNSDCF, fostering cross-sectoral coordination and seamless collaboration with the United Nations country team.	December 2025			

UNDP should enhance civil society engagement and the integration of inclusion issues in the design of interventions.

The evaluation highlighted the need for more effective, sustained and inclusive CSO participation in future UNDP initiatives. The development of a robust and comprehensive strategy to engage CSOs, particularly in rural areas, is crucial to ensure their active participation and growth. To this end, UNDP should develop a comprehensive strategy to enhance CSO participation, particularly in rural areas, by providing sustained support for their growth and development beyond low-value grant schemes. This strategy should focus on regions with limited prior engagement and ensure long-term capacity-building. UNDP should also collaborate with other United Nations agencies and like-minded organizations to explore opportunities for joint efforts in supporting CSOs.

Management response: Partially accepted.



UNDP recognizes the importance of this recommendation, however, it considers that CSOs have been operating within a limited space in the country. The NGO registration process is complex, including the process of receiving and reporting 'foreign funds', leading to a low number of NGOs being effectively operational in the country. Low-value grant schemes are designed to build capacities of NGOs in the country and serve as support for their growth and development. Moreover, UNDP involves NGOs as Responsible Parties – another programmatic instrument aimed at supporting the growth and development of NGOs. UNDP invested in developing measures and introducing initiatives to increase individual and collective citizens' participation in decision-making processes.

UNDP will continue investing in both State and civil society capacity to address various pressing societal challenges including prevention and addressing corruption, human rights protection and access to justice of marginalized groups, promoting disability-inclusive and equal participation, transparency and accountability; increasing citizen's engagement through participatory budgeting, community development plans for infrastructure projects and other development initiatives.

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Key action(s)	Completion	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
	date		Comments	Status
4.1 Update SOPs for project and programme management to enhance CSO and activist participation in programme and project cycles and introduce the requirement for project initiatives to organize capacity-building for NGOs prior to and throughout low-value grant schemes.	December 2025	Programme Team, Senior Management		
4.2 Include CSO development components in all the area-based strategies developed during the next CPD cycle.	December 2027	Programme Team, Senior Management		

RECOMMENDATION 5.

UNDP should strengthen efforts to advance GEWE and LNOB through comprehensive approaches, by building the capacity of a critical mass of national gender experts across all outcome-related sectors. Additionally, it should support research and studies that effectively inform the design of future interventions and enhance the GEWE and LNOB results framework.

Notable progress was made in promoting GEWE, but more strategic and comprehensive approaches are needed to address systemic barriers. This includes scaling up successful initiatives such as training in digital skills and entrepreneurship for women, and enhancing legislative support for women's empowerment.

UNDP should implement targeted capacity-building programmes to develop a critical mass of national gender experts in all outcome-related sectors. This can be achieved by organizing training, mentorship and knowledge-sharing initiatives, with a focus on sectors that are currently underrepresented in gender expertise.

UNDP should allocate resources to support in-depth research and studies that can inform the design of future interventions. These studies should address gaps in GEWE and LNOB, specifically focusing on areas like economic empowerment, governance and legal frameworks. A structured plan should be created for the dissemination and application of this research to inform project design.

UNDP should scale up successful programmes, such as those focused on digital skills and entrepreneurship for women, by broadening outreach, securing partnerships and creating platforms to replicate best practices in other regions or sectors. A clear roadmap for programme expansion should be developed, with timelines and resources specified.

UNDP should invest in the development of a comprehensive system for collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated data. This could involve collaborating with national statistical offices, international partners and civil society to build the necessary infrastructure and capacity to collect accurate data and track gender-related outcomes.

UNDP should ensure that the perspectives of vulnerable groups, such as PWD, ethnic minorities and the Afghan population, are systematically integrated into project designs. This can be done through inclusive consultation processes, participatory needs assessments and tailored interventions that address the specific challenges faced by these groups.

Management response: Partially accepted.



While UNDP acknowledges the need to strengthen strategic and comprehensive approaches to address systemic barriers to GEWE and LNOB, certain aspects of the recommendation require additional consideration in the context of resource availability, national priorities and existing institutional frameworks. UNDP has been advocating for the importance of a comprehensive system for collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated and disability data, including an institutional framework for data governance and management. However, achieving significant progress will require long-term efforts and external support. UNDP will invest in programming to build capacities of a critical mass of gender experts across all outcome-related sectors.

Recommendation 5 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Further expand programmatic engagement and collaboration with the private sector to develop at least two initiatives aimed at enhancing the access of women to digital trade and financial inclusion.	December 2026			
5.2 Facilitate the learning of Gender Experts through the Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions Programme.	December 2027	EGC		
5.3 Adopt country office Disability Inclusion Guidelines, ensuring all programming is in line with the accessibility standards for persons with disabilities.	December 2025	EGC		

RECOMMENDATION 6.



UNDP should implement a unified M&E system across CPD outcomes and enhance efforts to support the Government of Uzbekistan to generate robust policy evidence on gender and vulnerability.

UNDP should ensure that the country office M&E system is uniformly applied and used across all outcome areas of the CPD. UNDP should increase investment in the thorough assessment of pilot projects to identify their successes, failures and potential for replication or scaling. This entails establishing a structured process for capturing lessons learned and applying them to future initiatives, which will also assist the Government of Uzbekistan in making informed decisions about scaling up successful pilots to maximize impact.

UNDP should expand efforts to help the Government generate robust policy evidence, particularly in under-monitored areas such as GEWE. A comprehensive system is needed for collecting and analysing disaggregated statistics, considering factors like gender, vulnerability and geographic location. This data will be crucial for tracking the effectiveness of policies over time and making informed adjustments.

Management response: Fully accepted.



UNDP will explore the possibility of strengthening its M&E system through digital solutions and visualization tools for the improved capture of lessons learned and evidence-based decision-making for new programmes.

Recommendation 6 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Completion	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
	date		Comments	Status
6.1 Implement a digital solution in collaboration with TechCell of UNDP Serbia to enhance M&E processes for data collection and analysis.	December 2026	Strategic Planning and Integration Unit		
6.2 Further develop the capacity of UNDP M&E through targeted trainings, and learning materials.	December 2026	Strategic Planning and Integration Unit		
6.3 Update and detail SOPs on project and programme management ensuring that compliance processes are clearly defined and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.	December 2025	Strategic Planning and Integration Unit		

RECOMMENDATION 7.



To address the urgent and emerging needs of Uzbekistan, in the subsequent programme UNDP can strategically position itself as a leader by leveraging its comparative advantages in three interconnected areas: water management, environmental justice and B&HR.

Considering that water stress remains a critical challenge for the country and the entire Central Asian region, UNDP should provide targeted support by driving innovative water management solutions. This includes advancing circular water practices such as small-scale water treatment and reuse solutions, and advocating for water pricing reforms. UNDP leadership can be further solidified by introducing a water innovation fund to pilot and scale cutting-edge technologies, positioning the organization at the forefront of water sector reform.

UNDP should align with Uzbekistan's priorities on green transitions and digital transformation by integrating sustainable energy practices, promoting green jobs and advancing environmental resilience. It should also leverage digital technologies to enhance governance, smart agriculture and digital finance.

To address the growing need for equitable access to natural resources, UNDP should embed environmental justice into its programming, emphasizing justice and good governance to ensure that vulnerable populations are protected in environmental decision-making. This includes capacity-building programmes for judicial and law enforcement professionals to strengthen their ability to combat environmental crimes effectively. Future CPDs should emphasize multi-stakeholder approaches, promote rights-based approaches and address systemic inequities that exacerbate environmental harm. By aligning with international agreements, adopting measurable environmental justice indicators and empowering vulnerable communities through equitable participation and resource access, UNDP can ensure its programming tackles the triple planetary crisis, while advancing sustainable development and environmental accountability.

To further strengthen environmental justice, the country office should continue to expand the implementation of the UNDP Strategy on Environmental Justice, placing greater emphasis on key initiatives in future programming.⁹⁰

UNDP (2022). 'Promoting Environmental Justice - Securing our right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment through programming', Guidance note, available at: https://www.undp.org/rolhr/justice/environmental-justice.

The country office should continue its support for recent developments, while remaining flexible and adaptive to remain responsive to the fast-paced reforms. It should continue to support Uzbekistan's newly adopted transparency system for the transition to a green economy, NDC 3.0 and newly established institutions like the National Climate Centre and the Climate Council under the President, which are pivotal for monitoring and evaluating NDC implementation, while ensuring that interventions are timely, context-specific and complementary to national efforts. This ongoing support will not only strengthen the environmental justice agenda but also reinforce Uzbekistan's commitment to transparency, inclusiveness and resilience in its green transition.

Building on the successes and lessons of work in the legal protection of human rights, UNDP is well positioned to develop the B&HR ecosystem. This will include support to design initiatives with its long-term national partners, expand partnership with the private sector and utilize its global experience in B&HR, including consultations on national action plans and human rights due diligence training for businesses, to inform and guide local programming. UNDP should ensure that human rights are central to sustainable development, promoting responsible business practices that align with international standards. This comprehensive, rights-based approach will not only meet Uzbekistan's pressing development needs, but also strengthen the role of UNDP as a leader in sustainable and equitable growth.

Management response: Partially accepted. (•••



UNDP has been considering embedding environmental justice and B&HR into its climate and effective governance programming placing emphasis on improving environmental governance, policies, data and access to justice by ensuring the universal right to a healthy environment for all and promoting high ethical business according to the principle of "do not harm". It considers focusing on policy advocacy and institutional capacity-building of national partners, data monitoring to assess environmental justice impact, access to justice on environmental rights and advocating for best business practices emphasizing ethical social responsibility.

UNDP also considers promoting human rights protection mechanisms in businesses through designing and enhancing legislation and policies on B&HR, guiding businesses on addressing human rights issues, building capacities of business structures on corporate accountability and human rights and advocating for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in labour-related cases.

Key action(s)	Completion	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
	date		Comments	Status
7.1 Expand B&HR programming in coordination with the Istanbul Regional Hub with at least one new initiative launched that address specific B&HR issues in Uzbekistan.	December 2027	EGC and IRH Governance team		
7.2 Expand programming on environmental justice with at least one new initiative focused on environmental justice, ensuring that indicators for success are established and tracked throughout the project lifecycle.	December 2027	ECA and EGC in coordination with IRH		

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the Evaluation Resource Center website of the Independent Evaluation office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/24402

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Project list

Annex 3. Documents consulted

Annex 4. Site visits conducted

Annex 5. Status of country programme outcome & output indicators

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