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United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION

ESWATINI

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

CANGO	Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations
CO	Country office
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil society organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICT	Information and communication technology
MSME	Micro, small, and medium enterprises
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
RFM	Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital
RSTP	Royal Science and Technology Park
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEDCO	Small Enterprises Development Company
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

Evaluation Brief: Eswatini

Eswatini is a lower middle-income country with a population of approximately 1.2 million. The country has a relatively diversified economy, with key sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, and services. A significant portion of the population – around 75 percent – resides in rural areas, where economic vulnerabilities remain pronounced. Approximately 70 percent of rural residents live below the international poverty line, with a Gini coefficient of 51.5, placing Eswatini among the most unequal economies globally. The country's governance structure is characterized by its absolute monarchy, which has historically influenced political participation dynamics. Efforts to enhance governance and promote inclusive decision-making continue to be a focal point of national and international development partners. In 2021 civil unrest emerged amid calls for political reforms, highlighting the importance of ongoing dialogue and governance strengthening efforts to promote stability and inclusive economic growth.

The operations of UNDP in Eswatini within the current programme cycle (2021–2025) have been guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and align with the government's National Development Plan (2019/2020–2021/2022). During the period under consideration UNDP focused on two portfolios: (i) efficient and participatory governance, and (ii) inclusive economic growth. The Inclusive Economic Growth Portfolio of UNDP Eswatini focused on addressing the fundamental challenges of a shrinking private sector and the country's vulnerability to climatic extremes, which impact several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The Efficient and Participatory Governance Portfolio also aimed to strengthen institutions with constitutional mandates for oversight and accountability, enhance operational efficiencies through digital solutions, and improve judicial remedies for contract enforcement.
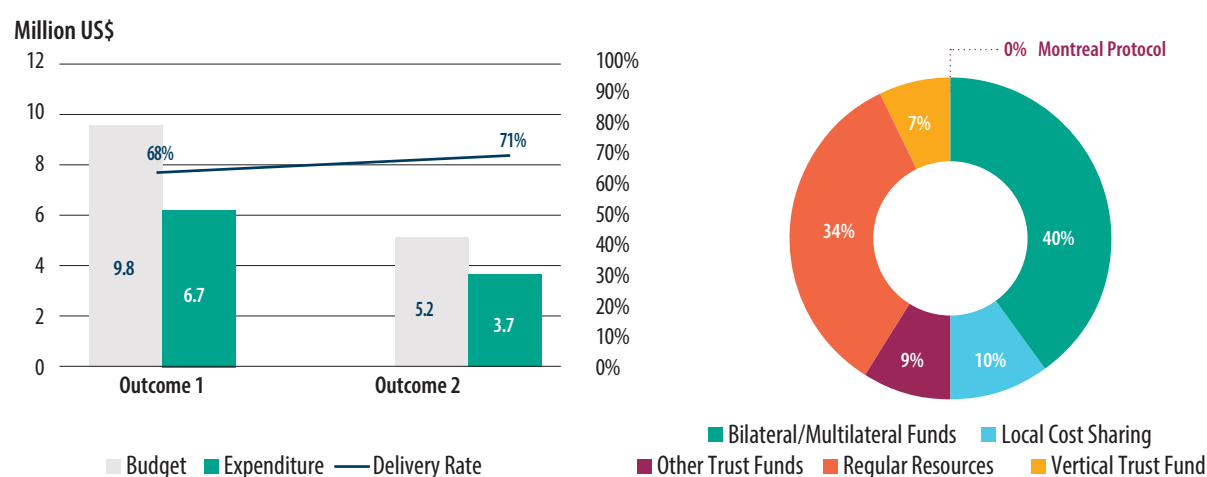
Findings and conclusions

UNDP has positioned itself as a trusted and strategic partner in Eswatini, supporting the government in advancing key national priorities in governance, economic reform, and social inclusion. It has provided technical expertise, capacity-building, and policy support across multiple sectors. UNDP has played a leading role in developing key national strategies, including the National Development Plan, the Integrated National Financing Strategy, and policies on governance and economic empowerment. It has demonstrated flexibility in responding to evolving national challenges, particularly in governance. Following the 2021 civil unrest, UNDP recalibrated its focus towards peacebuilding and conflict management, supporting national stabilization and recovery.

In the area of governance and the rule of law, UNDP supported the establishment of the Legal Aid Unit, the Small Claims Court, the remote remand system, and the Commercial Court to enhance access to justice. Additionally, it played a key role in integrating good governance as a pillar of the National Development Plan, underscoring its importance for economic recovery and political stability. UNDP also facilitated capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement and justice sector officials, ensuring alignment with international human rights standards. It supported the mainstreaming of SDG priorities into national development and budgeting systems through the formulation of the SDG Rescue Plan and the establishment of a Parliamentary Subcommittee on the SDGs to oversee SDG integration across all sectors. However, fragmentation of interventions and capacity constraints have weakened synergies across activities, limiting long-term systemic change.

In the area of inclusive economic growth, UNDP played a crucial role in promoting economic inclusion for women by supporting women-led businesses and providing entrepreneurial training. It implemented various financing and grant initiatives across multiple projects, improving access to finance for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and individuals in Eswatini. UNDP supported waste-to-livelihood initiatives, including support for MSMEs in the waste management value chain, contributing to a reduction in single-use plastics. However, UNDP's interventions to promote youth employment have had mixed outcomes due to weaknesses in design and siloed implementation with partners. UNDP's interventions in off-grid solar minigrids have demonstrated sustainable energy models for public institutions while contributing to a reduced carbon footprint. However, regulatory and financial sustainability challenges remain key barriers to scaling up these interventions. Addressing these challenges and securing longterm financing will be essential to ensuring the sustainability and impact of UNDP initiatives in Eswatini.

Recommendation 1: UNDP needs to focus on supporting the government on converting supported policies and strategies into practical, on-the-ground implementation while consolidating its efforts into fewer, interconnected projects for greater impact.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should strengthen its support to civil society organizations to facilitate their role in advancing the sustainable development goals.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should collaborate with national partners to strengthen project management, monitoring and evaluation, and outcome-level reporting through the development and implementation of actionable activities with clear responsibilities and capacity-building for both UNDP staff and implementing partners.

Recommendation 4: UNDP should further work with the Resident Coordinator's Office and UN Country Team to explore possible approaches of working with the government to consolidate ongoing efforts to address the underlying causes of the 2021 civil unrest and to ensure peace in Eswatini.

Recommendation 5: UNDP Eswatini should enhance its grant management through the use of investment-oriented criteria in the selection process, as well as structured follow-ups and performance-based milestones.

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION
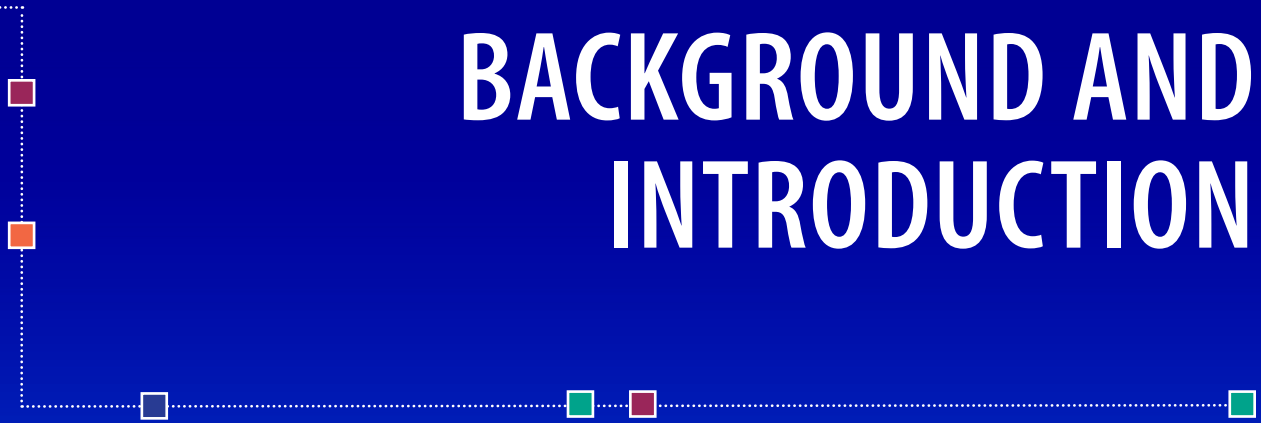
1.1 Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

As per the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Evaluation Policy, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP carries out Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs), typically in the penultimate year of a country programme cycle. This is the second country programme evaluation conducted by IEO for Eswatini, following the one conducted in 2019.[1] The current ICPE focused on the work of UNDP during its programme cycle 2021–2025, and aimed to contribute to UNDP's preparation of the next country programme. IEO conducted the evaluation in collaboration with the Government of Eswatini, the UNDP country office, and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa.

The ICPE was expected to inform the development and implementation of the next Country Programme Document 2026–2030, and aimed to capture and demonstrate the evaluative evidence of UNDP contributions to national development priorities, as well as the effectiveness of the strategies and approaches to facilitate and leverage national efforts to achieve sustainable development results. The assessment focused on the, key contributions, strategic positioning, relevance, and added value of the totality of the UNDP portfolio in Eswatini, given the changing operational context and national needs. It also looked at overall coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability vis-a-vis planned results within the current programme cycle. Further, to the extent possible, the evaluation assessed long-term transformative changes and any UNDP contribution to national development goals and international commitments. The evaluation addressed four key questions, which are presented in Box 1.

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?

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's ability to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms & Standards,[2] Ethical Guidelines, and Codes of Conduct for Evaluation.[3] The guiding principles of the UNDP Evaluation Policy were integrated into both the evaluation approach and the questions examined, including the use of inclusive and participatory approaches for stakeholder engagement, a focus on utility and utilization, and the integration of cross-cutting issues such as the 'leave no one behind' principle, gender equality and women's empowerment, and social and environmental standards.

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[1]   Independent Evaluation Office (2019), Independent Country Programme Evaluation, https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/16902.
[2]   See http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914.
[3]   See http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866 and http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100.

The ICPE was conducted at the outcome level using a Theory of Change approach. The implementation of the country programme and the results achieved were reviewed based on an analysis of contributions while examining adaptive capacity and the level of response to evolving needs and priorities during the review period.

Documents reviewed during the evaluation included the UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD), UNDP Eswatini Annual Reports, the Results-Oriented Annual Report, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Eswatini, the National Development Strategy for Eswatini, project reports, evaluations, financial reports, and audit reports, among others (see Annex 5).

A total of 129 individuals were interviewed, comprising 54 females (42 percent) and 75 males (58 percent). Site visits were made to the Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital, the Mavulandlela agriculture production and sustainable livelihood scheme (Hhohho Region), the Mangenge, Moyeni, and Masheleleni solar-powered borehole water supply systems (Hhohho Region), and the Mbabane Municipality permeable concrete park.

The quality assurance of the ICPE report involved the IEO's internal and external reviewers. The UNDP Eswatini country office, Regional Bureau for Africa, and the Government of Eswatini were given the opportunity to review and comment on the report.

FIGURE1. Breakdown of Interview Participants
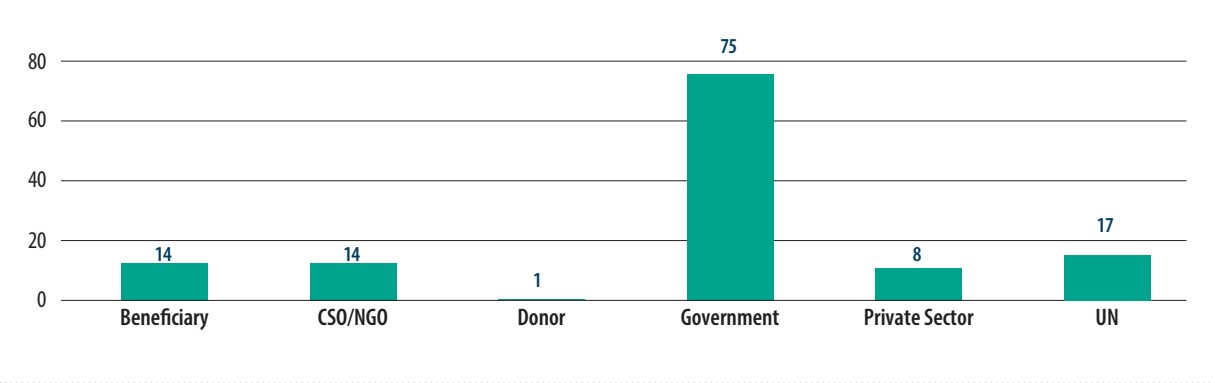
Evaluation limitations

One of the key limitations encountered was the lack of systematic documentation for project and monitoring reports. This posed challenges in assessing the progress and effectiveness of individual interventions, as output and outcome-level results were difficult to track without consistent data. In particular, interventions originally planned under the governance portfolio changed significantly following the 2021 civil unrest in Eswatini, but these changes were not systematically documented. The evaluation team was unable to visit certain project sites, particularly those involved in biodiversity conservation, due to the unavailability of key stakeholders, which thus prevented the evaluation team from conducting on-site assessments and gathering direct observations at these locations. There was limited participation from civil society organizations (CSOs), given the nature of stakeholders involved in UNDP's work. To address this, the evaluation team organized targeted consultations with a select group of CSOs, including national-level CSO networks and associations that advocate for human rights, environmental protection, and community development. The team conducted focus group discussions and interviews with implementing partners and government counterparts directly involved in project execution, and also triangulated findings with UNDP's

Results-Oriented Annual Report and financial reports. By combining qualitative insights with quantitative information, the team was able to bridge the gaps caused by missing formal monitoring reports and to ensure a more accurate assessment of the programme's progress.

1.3   Country context

The Kingdom of Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) is a small landlocked monarchy in southern Africa, with shared borders with South Africa and Mozambique in the east. It has a population of 1.2 million (2022)[4] and is classified as a lower middle-income country.[5] Eswatini remains predominantly rural, with nearly 75 percent of the population living in rural areas.[6] With a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of $3,986 (2022),[7] the economy of Eswatini exhibits a relatively diversified structure. Agriculture, forestry, and mining collectively contribute approximately 13 percent to the GDP; manufacturing (particularly textiles and sugar related processing) constitutes 37 percent; while the services sector, led by government services, accounts for 50 percent.[8] Despite its minimal contribution to national GDP, agriculture remains the most important sector for most of Eswatini's population, as over 70 percent of the country's people (60 percent of whom are women) rely on subsistence farming.[9]

As the only absolute monarchy in Africa, Eswatini has a unique governance structure, with the king positioned at the highest level of authority. The country's parliamentary system consists of a Senate, where 30 members serve with two-thirds appointed by the king, and a House of Assembly, with 65 members, of whom 55 are elected and 10 are appointed by the king.[10] All candidates run as independents as Eswatini's political landscape does not include a formal political party system.[11] The 2024 Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance placed Eswatini 35th among 54 African nations, noting a gradual decline in several governance aspects over the past decade. Transparency and media freedom are evolving areas, with recent rankings reflecting the country's efforts to address challenges within domains such as Security, Rule of Law, and Participation.[12] In 2022, Eswatini scored 30/100 on the Transparency International's corruption perception index and was ranked 130 out of 180 countries.[13] According to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, Eswatini was ranked 131 out of 180 countries with state control of broadcast media.[14]

Between 2021 and 2022 the civil unrest marked by large-scale demonstrations advocating for political reforms led to the involvement of state security forces, resulting in some casualties, along with damage to schools and disruptions to health and communication services.[15] In response to the unrest, the government established the re-construction fund to assist businesses that were affected during the riots, mainly in terms of infrastructure investment.[16]

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4   Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, National Development Plan (2023/2024–2027/2028): Good Governance, https://eswatini.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/NDP%20DRAFT%20FINAL%2016%20June%202022.pdf.

5   UNFPA (2019), "Kingdom of Eswatini Facts and Prospects: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights," https://eswatini.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_MIC_Country_Policy_Brief_ESWATINI.pdf.

6   UNICEF (2019), "The State of WASH Financing in Eastern and Southern Africa – Eswatini Country Level Assessment."

7   Ibid.; World Bank (2022), GDP per capita (current US$) – Eswatini, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=SZ.

8   IMF (2022), "Kingdom of Eswatini Decent Work Country Programme 2022–2025," https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---program/documents/genericdocument/wcms_891752.pdf.

9   World Bank (2021), "Climate Risk country profile: Eswatini," https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/15929-WB_eSwatini%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf.

10   The Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini: Background, https://www.parliament.gov.sz/about/background/.

11   UNICEF (2022), "A child rights-centred review of Climate, Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Reduction (CEED) issues in the Kingdom of Eswatini," https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/media/1546/file/Climate_Landscape_Analysis_For_Children_Report_2023.pdf.pdf.

12   World Bank (2022), Worldwide Governance Indicators, https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?Report_Name=WGI-Table&Id=ceea4d8b#.

13   Transparency International (2022), Corruption Perceptions Index, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/swz.

14   Reporters Without Borders (2022), World Press Freedom Index, https://rsf.org/en/index?year=2022.

15   Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2022), United Nations Human Rights Report 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/ohchr-reports/ohchr-report-2022.pdf; UNICEF Eswatini (2022), Country Office Annual Report 2021, https://www.unicef.org/media/116991/file/Eswatini-2021-COAR.pdf.

16   The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini (2022), Second Voluntary National Review Report, https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Eswatini%20Report.pdf.

Poverty is disproportionately concentrated in rural areas where 75 percent of the population live.[17] Of these, 70 percent live below the international poverty line, compared to 20 percent in the urban areas.[18] Notwithstanding a high gross domestic product per capita, Eswatini, with a Gini coefficient of 51.5, has the tenth highest income inequality in the world, with half of the wealth owned by 20 percent of the population.[19] In 2022 the country's Human Development Index was 0.610, positioning it at 142 out of 191 countries.[20] The government spends the equivalent of 2.2 percent of gross domestic product on social protection, including cash grants for vulnerable groups, school meals, free primary education, and free basic health services.[21] High unemployment and the high concentration of employment in low value-added economic activities such as subsistence agriculture are a major factor behind the relatively high incidence of poverty.[22]

High levels of youth unemployment, particularly among young women, are a pressing concern, with 67.5 percent of young women (ages 15–24) unemployed. This figure is significantly above regional averages, indicating challenges in access to skills training, job opportunities, and economic inclusion for young women. Employment gaps are further evident in labour force participation, where only 47.4 percent of women are actively engaged, compared to 54.7 percent of men. Limited economic opportunities reinforce systemic poverty and inequality, as women are often confined to low-paying and informal sectors, with limited access to leadership roles in various industries.[23] Eswatini's land policy has remained in draft form since its initial development in 1999 and revision in 2009, leaving the country without a specific land act. The lack of formal endorsement has left land tenure and reform as highly contentious issues, with many people lacking guaranteed security of tenure.[24] Women and girls (up to 40 percent of household heads in rural areas) face restricted access to land, agricultural extension services, credit, infrastructure, technology, and markets that are crucial to enhancing their productivity and livelihoods.[25] According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Eswatini scored 0.745 on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2023, reflecting some improvement but need for progress towards gender parity.[26]

The size of Eswatini's public sector and its growth trajectory has increased the cost of doing business, and crowded out the private sector and investments in productive sectors.[27] The country has 49 State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), which, given the size of the economy, is considered excessive.[28] About 60 percent of the national budget is consumed by public sector wages, salaries, and transfers.[29] The significant presence of SOEs in key sectors such as electricity, telecommunications, and transportation has shaped the competitive landscape, presenting challenges for the growth of private enterprises.[30] The top five leading constraints faced by the private sector locally are the regulatory framework, government inefficiencies, competition,

[17]   United Nations Common Country Analysis of the Kingdom of Eswatini (April 2020), https://eswatini.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/CCA%20Report%20-%20FINAL%20for%20printing%2022%20July.pdf.
[18]   The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini (2022), Second Voluntary National Review Report, https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Eswatini%20Report.pdf.
[19]   IMF (2022), "Kingdom of Eswatini Decent Work Country Programme 2022–2025; World Food Programme (2019), Eswatini country strategic plan (2020-2024), https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108645/download/?_ga=2.69140883.360407736.1707251167-584447011.1707251166.
[20]   UNDP Human Development Report, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/SWZ.
[21]   World Food Programme (2019), Eswatini country strategic plan (2020–2024).
[22]   World Bank (2020), https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/SM2020/Global_POVEQ_SWZ.pdf; World Food Programme (2019), Eswatini country strategic plan (2020–2024).
[23]   World Bank (2024), "Eswatini Gender Landscape," https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099944207042220536/pdf/IDU10e81f2f6165a3140191820612c53f080806c.pdf.
[24]   Ministry of Agriculture, Swaziland (2018), Country Report of the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme, https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/ldn_targets/Swaziland%20LDN%20TSP%20Country%20Report.pdf.
[25]   Ibid.; World Food Programme (2019), Eswatini country strategic plan (2020–2024).
[26]   World Bank (2024), "Eswatini Gender Landscape."
[27]   World Bank (2023), https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/eswatini/overview.
[28]   Eswatini Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre, https://www.separc.co.sz/2022/02/25/a-motivation-for-public-sector-reforms-in-eswatini/.
[29]   International Monetary Fund, Kingdom of Eswatini: 2023 Article IV Consultation – Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Kingdom of Eswatini, IMF Country Report No. 23/160, 18 April 2023, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2023/05/05/Kingdom-of-Eswatini-2023-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-533091.
[30]   International Monetary Fund, Kingdom of Eswatini: 2024 Article IV Consultation – Press Release and Staff Report; IMF Country Report No. 24/304, 10 September 2024, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2024/09/27/Kingdom-of-Eswatini-2024-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-and-Staff-Report-555669.

cost of utilities, and tax issues.[31] Access to credit for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is constrained with women disproportionally affected. For instance, in 2020 only 13 percent of women-owned businesses accessed formal credit versus 19 percent of male-owned enterprises.[32]

Due to a combination of political, geographic, and social factors, Eswatini is identified as the 57th most vulnerable country to climate change impacts, facing considerable risks from climate-related issues such as extreme weather events, water scarcity, and food insecurity.[33] On the 'readiness' scale, Eswatini ranks 145th, meaning it is less prepared to effectively address climate change impacts.[34] For instance, in 2021 Cyclone Eloise resulted in extensive flooding, which led to widespread damage to infrastructure and utility networks, loss of livelihoods, and environmental degradation. In February 2023 torrential rains devastated road infrastructure in part of the Lubombo region, in the eastern part of the country.[35] Climate change has an adverse effect on the majority of people, particularly women, who comprise a majority of the population in rural areas and are engaged in subsistence farming.[36] Notably, 90 percent of rural women depend on firewood collected from the forest as a cooking fuel.[37]

1.4   UNDP programme under review

The work of UNDP in the Kingdom of Eswatini dates back to 1971, with the first standard agreement between the government and UNDP signed in 1977.[38] The initial work of UNDP in the country focused on sustainable human development, that is, expanding people's capacities, choices, and opportunities in ways that are economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.[39] During the previous programme cycle (2016–2020), UNDP focused on inclusive economic growth with the aim of providing advisory and technical services to support evidence-based policy development and to enhance data generation capacity (part of the Strengthening National Capacities for Poverty Reduction project).

Both the mid-term evaluation of the CPD conducted by the country office and the independent country programme evaluation by the IEO in 2019 noted that the previous UNDP country programme effectively identified relevant priorities aligned with Eswatini's needs, such as inclusive growth, resilience, and governance. However, execution deviated from these goals due to demand-driven interventions, resulting in a less cohesive approach across projects. The evaluation further noted that limited funding and human resources impacted the effectiveness and scalability of UNDP's activities in Eswatini, while a high number of small-scale, partner-driven activities led to increased operational costs. The evaluation highlights a gap in strategic focus and long-term planning, with many activities being reactive and fragmented. There was also limited systematic monitoring, making it challenging to assess the programme's contributions to sustainable change.

The activities of UNDP in Eswatini within the current programme cycle (2021–2025) have been guided by the UNSDCF and align with the National Development Plan (2019/2020–2021/2022) of the Kingdom of Eswatini. The current country programme aimed to leverage UNDP's integrator role to ensure inclusivity and

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[31]   Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (2023), National Development Plan (2023/2024–2027/2028).

[32]   World Bank (2023), https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/eswatini/overview.

[33]   World Bank (2021b), Metadata Climate Change Knowledge Portal (CCKP), ///C:/Users/frederick.appiah-kus/Downloads/CCKP_Metadata_November%20 2021.pdf.

[34]   Ibid.; Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini (2023b), "Eswatini Environment Fund: Funding climate change adaptation and biodiversity actions at the local level," https://napglobalnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/napgn-en-2023-eswatini-environmental-fund.pdf; World bank (2021b), Metadata Climate Change Knowledge Portal (CCKP).

[35]   UNICEF (2022), "A child rights-centred review of Climate, Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Reduction (CEED) issues in the Kingdom of Eswatini," https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/media/1546/file/Climate_Landscape_Analysis_For_Children_Report_2023.pdf.pdf.

[36]   Ibid.; Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini (2023), Eswatini Environment Fund.

[37]   UNICEF (2022), "A child rights-centred review of Climate, Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Reduction."

[38]   UNDP Eswatini, https://www.undp.org/eswatini/about-us#:~:text=The%20work%20of%20UNDP%20in,%2C%20socially%2C%20and%20 environmentally%20sustainable.

[39]   Ibid.

institutional strengthening, focusing on governance and inclusive growth. This involves thought leadership in policy integration, human rights advocacy, strengthening public institutions, facilitating innovative financing, technology solutions, and leveraging global networks to address challenges such as climate change and poverty vulnerability.

Two portfolios, namely inclusive economic growth (Outcome 1) and the efficient and participatory governance (Outcome 2) were the focus of the CPD. The Inclusive Economic Growth Portfolio of UNDP Eswatini focused on addressing the fundamental challenges of a shrinking private sector and the country's vulnerability to climatic extremes, which affect several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). By adopting a poverty-environment nexus approach, the portfolio aimed to strengthen policy and programmatic interventions to enhance economic growth and resilience. The portfolio included projects focused on nature-based solutions, private sector-led growth, youth employment and empowerment of women, disaster risk reduction, access to clean energy, and structural transformation for economic recovery.

The Efficient and Participatory Governance Portfolio of UNDP Eswatini aimed to strengthen institutions with constitutional mandates for oversight and accountability, enhance operational efficiencies through digital solutions, and improve judicial remedies for contract enforcement. The portfolio also aimed to contribute to promoting sustainable economic growth and addressing SDGs related to governance and equality (SDGs 1, 5, 8, 10, 16, and 17). Key interventions included building capacities of oversight institutions to promote good governance, rule of law, and access to justice, and deploying digital solutions to improve public service delivery.

The planned resources of the CPD for the period 2021–2025 were set at $29.7 million, representing approximately 23 percent of the total planned resources for the UNSDCF (2021–2025).[40] Over the period under evaluation (2021–2024), the Inclusive Growth Portfolio (Outcome 1) has been the largest with $6.7 million (64 percent) of the total programme expenditure as against $3.7 million (36 percent) recorded under the Governance Portfolio (Outcome 2). UNDP delivered 68 percent of the planned budget for Outcome 1 and 71 percent for Outcome 2. The organization implemented 23 project outputs, of which 11 (48 percent) were executed directly by the organization and 12 (52 percent) by the government (i.e., the National Implementation Modality).

In terms of resource mobilization, the bulk of the resources spent during this cycle came from bilateral/multilateral donors (40 percent), followed by UNDP core resource (34 percent). The remaining funds were allocated from local cost sharing (10 percent), other trust funds (9 percent). and vertical trust funds (7 percent). For a detailed analysis of the country portfolio, refer to Annex 5. The Government of Italy was the largest donor, contributing $1.7 million to the expenditure during the evaluation cycle between 2021 and 2024. The Government of Germany followed as the second-largest contributor with $1.0 million, while the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency provided $0.3 million towards supporting these outcomes during the period under consideration.

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[40]   UN Eswatini Country Results Report (2020), https://eswatini.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/UN%20One%20Report_April%2014_2021.pdf.

FIGURE 2. Budget and Expenditure Breakdown by Outcome (2021–2024)

Million US$

Budget ▪ Expenditure ▪ Delivery Rate
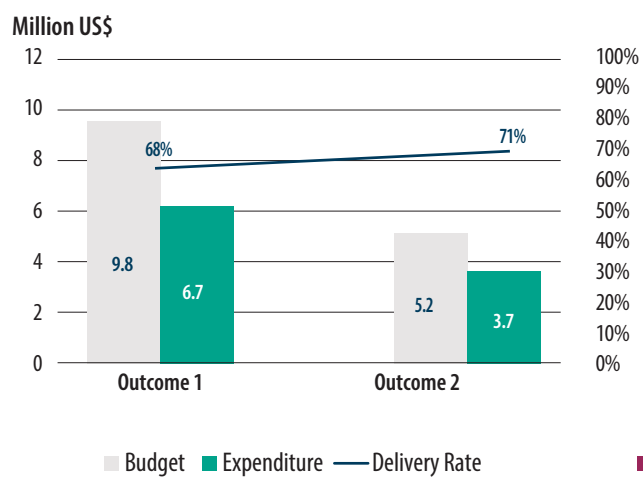
Source: Data from Atlas and Quantum, 23 September 2024

FIGURE 3. Programme Expenditure by Fund Source (2021–2024)

■ Bilateral/Multilateral Funds   ■ Local Cost Sharing
■ Other Trust Funds   ■ Regular Resources   ■ Vertical Trust Fund
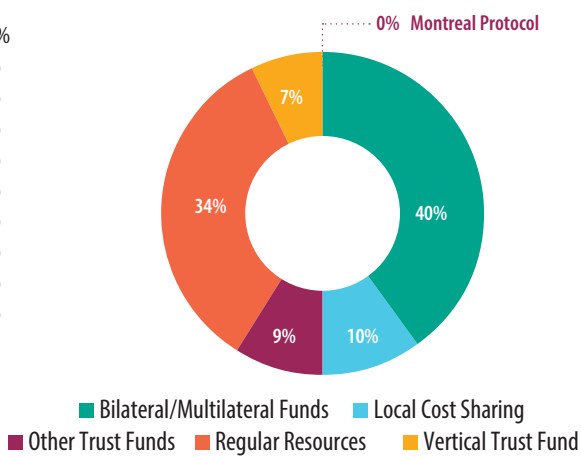
CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

2.1   UNDP's strategic role and coherence of interventions

This section examines UNDP's strategic role in advancing Eswatini's national development priorities through an integrated approach that encompasses positioning within the national development landscape, resource mobilization, and targeted capacity-building efforts.

Finding 1 – Strategic positioning. UNDP serves as a central and trusted development partner to the Government of Eswatini, fostering close relationships with government agencies to advance national priorities in governance, economic reform, and social inclusion. Leveraging its reputation and influence within both the UN system and among local stakeholders, UNDP provided strategic planning, technical expertise, and capacity-building support across several development areas. However, fragmentation of interventions, capacity constraints, and frequent staff changes presented challenges to its work.

In the small but strategically significant country of Eswatini, UNDP operates as a key partner within a small but impactful country office. Despite its size, UNDP's strong reputation has positioned it as a principal development partner, especially with several ministries and government-affiliated agencies, including the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Parliament of Eswatini, Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy, Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Trade. UNDP's consistent contributions to national development efforts have established it as a trusted partner, fostering close relationships that enable it to provide tailored support in priority areas such as governance, economic reform, and social inclusion. Through these partnerships, UNDP not only addressed immediate needs but also supported the government in laying the groundwork for long-term change.

UNDP's influence extends beyond its partnerships with government entities. Within the broader United Nations family in Eswatini, UNDP carries considerable weight, with 23 percent of the total UN budget in the country. This financial stature, coupled with its established relationships, places UNDP in a unique position among UN agencies in Eswatini. The combination of UNDP's close relationship with the government and its significant share of UN resources positioned it to take a leading role in supporting the government development agenda for a more resilient and inclusive society. Through its programmes UNDP provided national stakeholders access to specialized knowledge, capacities, and expertise across a wide range of development challenges.

Many implementing partners view UNDP as a valued partner, reflecting a high level of trust and satisfaction with its contributions. National partners consistently affirm UNDP's role in implementing projects that align with national priorities. UNDP is particularly recognized for providing valuable technical expertise in strategic planning, digital transformation, and capacity-building. Its involvement in developing key national strategies, such as the National Development Plan, Integrated National Financing Strategy, and action plan to increase mobilization of financial resources for SDG implementation and sector specific strategies, was well appreciated. Furthermore, UNDP's support for legal reforms, human rights initiatives, and judicial strategies has been instrumental in the ongoing efforts to strengthen the rule of law in Eswatini. UNDP's contributions to waste management for livelihood, access to renewable energy, and gender equality and women's empowerment were also acknowledged by stakeholders.

UNDP's value addition to national development and its technical support to the government are further evidenced by the cost-sharing agreement between the Government of Eswatini and UNDP. Under this agreement, the government allocates an annual contribution of $300,000 (about 10 percent of the country office expenditure) to support various activities managed by UNDP. This financial arrangement supports initiatives related to the country's national development plans, SDGs, and capacity-building for government institutions. This cost sharing arrangement has strengthened UNDP's engagement with the government.

The country office's annual planning cycle and its support to national partners, based on their annual requests, have weakened synergies across its activities and support by pulling it in different directions at the same time. This moved the country office (CO) away from the initial strategic focus of the CPD and led to the fragmentation of its interventions. The fragmented approach has stretched the limited capacity of the country office and fostered a competitive culture among national partners for UNDP funding. This limited capacity has further impeded the CO's ability to respond to numerous requests from national partners. Additionally, changes in UNDP key project management staff have been a significant barrier to effective collaboration, affecting the consistency and effectiveness of ongoing projects.

Finding 2 – Resource mobilization. The country office's budget and expenditures saw an improvement compared to the previous cycle. However, a shortfall in non-core resources and overall financial sustainability remains a concern.

UNDP Eswatini's resource mobilization journey reflects a strategic adaptation to the limited donor environment of a lower middle-income country facing significant challenges. Planned resources for the current CPD cycle were set at $29.7 million, representing a 53 percent increase in targeted financial resources over the previous CPD budget of $15.7 million. Despite this somewhat ambitious target, the country office managed to mobilize 50.5 percent of this budget. Core resources accounted for 32 percent and non-core resources constituted 68 percent of the total resources mobilized. While non-core resources form the major share of total revenue, it remains the major shortfall in resource mobilization when planned and actual resources mobilized are compared (see Figure 4).

While there have been fluctuations in resources across recent years, the current CPD cycle can be considered more successful with double the resources of the previous cycle (see Figure 5). This was mainly due to external funding from donors, including the Government of Italy, the Government of Germany, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Additionally, the country office had access to emergency funding opportunities due to COVID-19 and the 2021 civil unrest. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) also continued to be one of the key sources of funding for the country office both under the current and previous CPD cycle. With two more GEF-funded projects expected to come on board, the country office's resources are likely to increase further by the end of the CPD cycle. The CO recently signed a grant agreement with the European Union for €820,000 to support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in green and renewable energy initiatives. Additionally, it received $250,000 from the SDGs Fund for 2024 to further support MSMEs in these areas.

FIGURE 4. Core and Non-Core Resources: CPD Target, Budget & Expenditure

Million US$
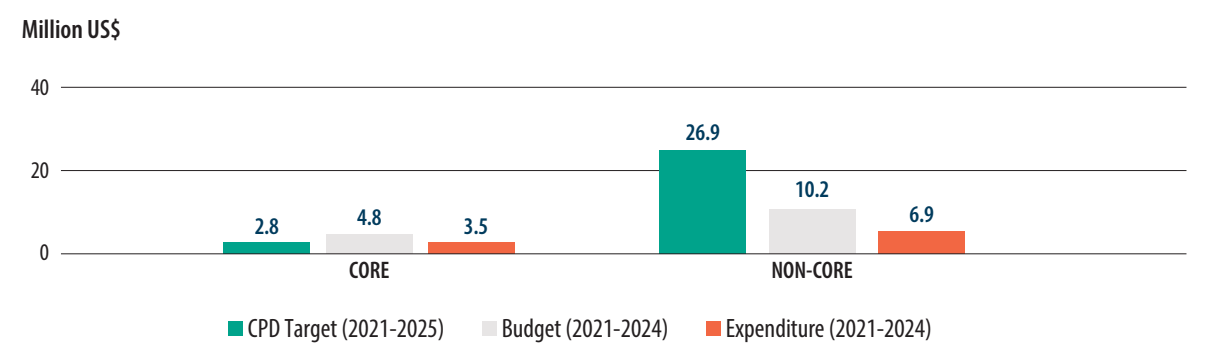
Source: Data from Atlas and Quantum, 23 September 2024

FIGURE 5. Annual Budget and Expenditure (2013–2024)

Million US$

Budget ▢ Expenditure ▮ Delivery Rate —●—
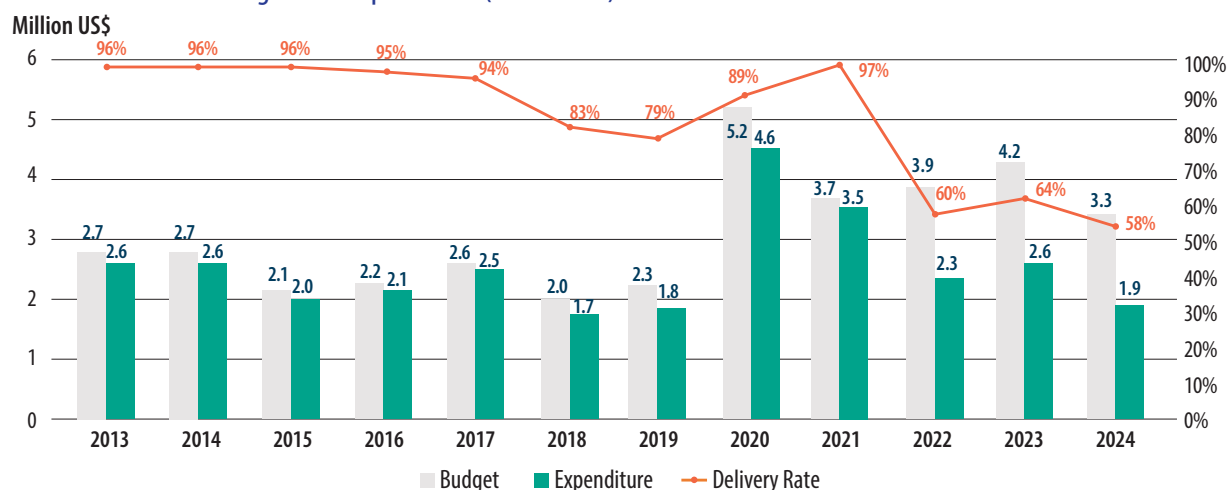
FIGURE 6. Annual Budget and Expenditure (2021–2024)

Million US$

Budget ▢ Expenditure ▮ Delivery Rate —●—
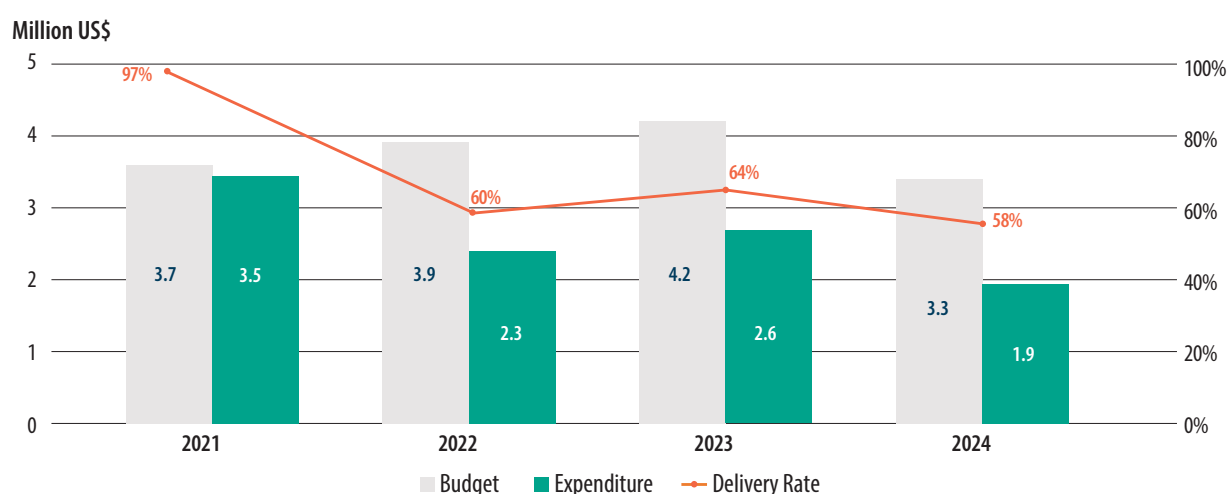
Source: Data from Atlas and Quantum, 23 September 2024

The upward trajectory of resources also comes with some risk for financial sustainability, given that donor funding, which has been a key component of this growth, remains unpredictable. The overall delivery rate of the country office was 69 percent from 2021 to 2024, with a noticeable decline in delivery rates for both portfolios after 2021. This drop was particularly pronounced in the Inclusive Growth Portfolio, which showed a consistent downward trend, falling from a high of 96 percent in 2021 to 54 percent in 2024. Almost all donor- and vertical-funded projects required extensions beyond their initially planned phases. Key factors contributing to these delivery constraints included COVID-19, the 2021 civil unrest, the movement of key staff, and the limited number of country office personnel available to manage the numerous projects, as well as bureaucratic procurement processes both within UNDP and the national government. Also, in some cases government restructuring, such as the relocation of the e-government programme from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of ICT, affected implementation of some interventions.

Finding 3 – Portfolio approach and coherence. UNDP Eswatini developed comprehensive portfolio documents and established portfolio boards made up of government ministries, parastatals, and civil society. Management of the portfolios was not optimal and did not provide strategic cohesion, leading to weak synergies across portfolios.

In the current CPD cycle, the country office developed a comprehensive portfolio document with associated ToC and Results frameworks to guide their implementation based on recommendations from the previous ICPE. The CO streamlined its outcome areas from three in the previous CPD cycle to two in the current cycle, resulting in reduced overlap in interventions. For instance, the merging of governance and service delivery helped align governance reforms with broader service delivery improvements, such as digitalization and institutional strengthening, under a single portfolio.

Portfolio boards were constituted, comprising members from various sectors, including government ministries, parastatals, and civil society. The Governance Portfolio Board was chaired by the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, while the Inclusive Growth Board was led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. The oversight functions of the portfolio boards were regarded as a key success of the portfolio within this CPD cycle. The work of the portfolio boards helped ensure broader participation and facilitated alignment with the Eswatini National Development Plan.

Despite the fact that board meetings did not occur as regularly as planned, a review of meeting minutes shows that they provided some strategic guidance on key initiatives, particularly through their engagement in reviewing Annual Work Plans, identifying bottlenecks, and endorsing critical activities for future implementation. The boards facilitated discussions around the reallocation of resources, directing funds to areas that could offer greater impact. For example, in 2022 activities that were delayed or showed little progress saw funds reallocated to high-priority interventions such as capacity-building in peacebuilding and in youth engagement. This reallocation ensured a more efficient use of UNDP resources and helped keep projects aligned with evolving national needs. This also included the addition of the Crisis and Stabilization Recovery project, which supported UNDP's response to the 2021 civil unrest. The boards also identified and provided recommendations for addressing implementation challenges. For instance, they recommended periodic training for the improved delivery rate and implementation of activities, and addressed the bottleneck created by government procurement processes.

Both the Governance and Inclusive Growth portfolios of UNDP Eswatini reflected important elements of the portfolio approach, such as interconnected interventions and long-term change.[41] The adoption of the portfolio approach helped to achieve internal coherence between the two portfolios in a few specific interventions, including the establishment of the Small Claims Court, the digitalization and decentralization of service delivery points through establishing community-based innovation hubs to improve the ease of doing business, and the Citizens Economic Empowerment Act. However, except for these specific cases, the two portfolios operated largely in isolation, with limited linkages and synergies. This limited synergy between the two portfolios is noteworthy, especially considering that both portfolio teams in some cases worked with the same national partners, and that individuals within the national partners sat on both portfolio boards. This disconnect suggests that potential efficiencies and collaborative opportunities were underutilized, which could otherwise enhance the effectiveness and outcome of UNDP's contributions.[42] There was little emphasis on continuous learning or adaptive management. Rather, the focus was more on completing the outlined activities rather than using the lessons learned to inform ongoing and future interventions.

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[41]   UNDP Portfolio Approaches for systems transformation, https://popp.undp.org/policy-page/portfolio.
[42]   Evaluation Report: Outcome Evaluation of the Governance Portfolio.

Finding 4 – Capacity-building and development of key strategic policies and frameworks. UNDP has played a key role in supporting the development of strategic policies and frameworks in Eswatini. This support, provided through technical assistance, capacity-building initiatives, and cost-sharing agreements, has resulted in crucial strategies – enhancing national capacities and contributing to national planning and local revenue mobilization. There is an opportunity for UNDP to engage further, though more selectively, on the implementation of these policies and strategies.

Policy development and the creation of an enabling environment have been crucial components of both the Inclusive Growth portfolio and the Effective and Participatory Governance portfolio, aiding in the development of key policies, strategic plans, and frameworks. UNDP's instruments in this regard include technical support, often through consultants (strategic plan development, legislation and policy drafting, technical assistance), and support for convening partners and stakeholders (venue, conferencing, transport).[43] The Governance Portfolio, for instance, supported the development of strategic documents such as the New National Development Plan (2023/2024–2027/2028); Eswatini Parliament Strategic Plan (2022–2026); Ministry of ICT Strategic Plan (2022–2027); National Gender Policy and the Strategy to End Violence (2022–2027); Youth Think Tank Strategic Plan (2022–2026); Civil Service Commission Strategic Plan (2024–2029); and Attorney General Strategic Plan (2023–2028).

The major project that supported policy-level work under the Inclusive Growth portfolio was the 'Structural Transformation for Economic Recovery and Poverty Eradication'. This project was implemented through a cost-sharing arrangement between the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and UNDP. All major policy interventions under the Inclusive Growth portfolio were implemented through government cost-sharing, including the SDG Acceleration Plan's submission at the UN General Assembly's High-Level Political Forum, the 2022 evaluation of the National Development Strategy (NDS), development of a new NDS roadmap, and capacity-building for the Central Statistical Agency to produce timely reports. Additionally, collaboration with the Eswatini Central Bank to enhance the Eswatini Composite Indicator of Economic Activity and the development of a macroeconomic model to support medium- to long-term planning were also carried out through government cost-sharing. The Inclusive Growth portfolio further supported the development of the National Integrated Waste Management Pollution Prevention and Control Strategy; Mbabane Climate Change Action Strategy; Integrated National Financing Framework; Citizen Economic Empowerment Regulations; Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises policy; Eswatini Climate Change Bill, etc.

In total, UNDP supported nearly 50 policies, strategies, legislative frameworks, and reports, half of which have been completed while the other half are ongoing (see Annex 9). While these strategic documents may not be ends in themselves, they provide a clear strategic direction for the national partners to implement their mandate and are also expected to form a key component of the performance management framework being introduced across public institutions. The policies and strategies also provide a medium-term framework for budgeting and resource mobilization among many public institutions, which was previously lacking. These efforts have enhanced the overall relevance of UNDP's work in Eswatini by strengthening its alignment with the NDP. The assistance provided by UNDP through the development of strategic documents, frameworks, and policies not only addresses developmental needs but also strengthens its relationship with the national government and provides a strong foundation for its future work.

The development of these strategic documents and related training have contributed to the capacity of national institutions. For instance, UNDP technical support on training of tax auditors from the Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) and tackling cross-border tax crimes under the UNDP-supported Tax Inspectors Without Borders Initiative helped to enhance the understanding and capacity of the ERS and tax authorities

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43   Ibid.

on modalities of auditing the construction and manufacturing industries. The funding also helped in the building of the national capacity of tax investigation teams, leading to the prosecution of over 40 tax offenders. In addition, UNDP facilitated the participation of ERS officers in the 2023 Dialogue on Tax and the Sustainable Development Goals, held in New York in November 2023, as well as the inaugural UNDP Global Dialogue on Public Finance and Taxation for Gender Equality, held in Istanbul in February 2024. Furthermore, UNDP supported the ERS in exploring taxation opportunities within the digital services sector. These initiatives collectively strengthened the ERS's domestic revenue mobilization efforts, enabling the organization to exceed its revenue target for fiscal year 2023–2024 by 10 percent.

While UNDP's policy level work was appreciated by the partners, and in some cases have contributed to some intermediate outcomes, the individual policies, strategic plans, and frameworks that were supported by UNDP were often ad-hoc and standalone interventions that were not connected to a specific project workstream. Consequently, the extent to which UNDP's support for these upstream initiatives could translate into implementation and visible results remains unclear. The public sector in Eswatini is noted for frequent reshuffling of trained officials to other functions or their departure for better opportunities,[44] and this high turnover has in some cases weakened UNDP's efforts to improve capacity and has created a persistent demand for the necessary skills. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and documentary review show a limited level of implementation of previous similar policy work that has been supported by UNDP. Fiscal constraint within the government makes it further challenging to find internal funding for the implementation of the many policies and strategies that UNDP has supported.[45] These numerous policies and strategies appear to create high expectation of UNDP to support implementation going forward, something that the CO does not have the financial means and the capacity to support altogether.

2.2   Efficient and participatory governance

This section presents findings on UNDP's contributions to enhancing good governance, strengthening the rule of law, and advancing digital services to improve public service delivery in Eswatini.

Finding 5 – Contribution to good governance. Through UNDP support, governance became a pillar in the NDP, and the government upheld the importance of governance for economic recovery and political stability. While UNDP was able to respond to contextual changes and emerging national priorities by recalibrating its governance activities to focus on peacebuilding and conflict management, the impact was limited due to insufficient engagement with broader communities, and the absence of expanded national dialogue.

UNDP's work on good governance has significantly increased compared to the previous CPD cycle, with expenditure rising from $0.56 million to $3.7 million mainly through non-core resources. Key components of this work have focused on ministerial and departmental strategy and policy development and on capacity building for national partners in democratic governance, strengthening the rule of law, enhancing public administration, and fostering accountability and transparency. In line with the recommendations from the previous ICPE, the outputs in the original CPD were planned concisely around three thematic areas, and three national partners: (1) strengthening parliamentary oversight and accountability institutional mechanisms (implementing partner: Parliament); (2) Digital solutions for improved services and implementing the SDGs

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44   Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, National Development Plan (2023/2024–2027/2028).
45   World Bank, "Kingdom of Eswatini: Economic Update," https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099072823081525608/pdf/
      P17981206f2b8308c093e1025d404ea8864.pdf.

(implementing partner: Ministry of Information, Communications, and Technology), and (3) strengthening institutional capacities for rule of law, transparency, and access to justice (implementing partner: Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs).

The work of UNDP helped to integrate the SDGs into parliamentary functions through the establishment of the UN Parliamentary Committee, dedicated to SDG-related issues across thematic areas such as health, education, and gender. Training programmes for parliamentarians helped to increase capacity for SDG advocacy and oversight functions. Additionally, UNDP's interventions helped to increase awareness and recognition within the national government that good governance is essential for economic development. For the first time in the country's history, the National Development Plan (2023/2024–2027/2028) identifies good governance as a fundamental pillar for achieving economic recovery, sustainable growth, and improved livelihoods. The plan also emphasizes that good governance is essential for political stability, which is crucial for fostering peace, national unity, and economic recovery.

The 2021 civil unrest led to a recalibration of activities towards peacebuilding, conflict management, and dialogue interventions that primarily focused on human rights adherence and justice system improvements to promote human rights and empower communities with the necessary legal tools to claim their rights (see Finding 6). In addition, UNDP supported youth participation through platforms such as the Youth Think Tank and Women's Advisory Committee, which aimed to involve the voices of women and youth in peace processes. UNDP further supported the development of an integrated Crisis Stabilization and Recovery Strategy and Plan aimed at helping the country recover from the shocks of the 2021 crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of UNDP's approach was to "consolidate its position and influence from government and civil society to establish a transparent, inclusive, and participatory coordination mechanism for issues sparking the crisis to be discussed and for solutions to be explored."[46]

There was limited documentation of governance interventions, especially for activities outside the original CPD plan, making it challenging to comprehensively track all implemented actions and their potential outcomes. While the recalibration of the governance activities to peacebuilding and conflict management helped to align UNDP's governance interventions to the changing development context and emerging national priorities, the effectiveness of these initiatives was limited due to insufficient engagement with broader communities. A planned national dialogue that emerged after the political unrest did not expand as initially envisioned. The process was redirected towards a "traditional Sibaya format"[47] in which UNDP had a limited role.

Finding 6 – Rule of law. UNDP implemented legal aid, Remote Remand System, Small Claims Court, and Commercial Court initiatives that are contributing to the modernization of the justice system and access to justice in Eswatini. Despite these advances, however, challenges remain in measuring the impact of some of these initiatives as well as ensuring their sustainability.

In response to the 2021 unrest, UNDP supported the Commission on Human Rights by providing training for law enforcement officers to ensure that their conduct aligns with international human rights standards. Building on this work, the organization also supported His Majesty's Correctional Services in developing regulations for the Correctional Services Act of 2018. These regulations, known as the Correctional Services Regulations of 2020, were promulgated into law with UNDP's assistance. In addition, UNDP facilitated capacity-building for officers of His Majesty's Correctional Services, aimed at ensuring fair treatment of

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[46]   UNDP Crisis Stabilization and Recovery Project Document.
[47]   The planned national dialogue in Eswatini followed the traditional Sibaya approach, a culturally rooted gathering often referred to as the "people's parliament." This assembly took place in October 2023 at the royal kraal, where citizens came together to present their views and perspectives to the king and other leaders. While the Sibaya provided an opportunity for the king to engage with the nation in a format that is familiar and meaningful within Eswatini's cultural framework, there was lack of consensus on whether it was the right forum for the dialogue.

offenders and proper disciplinary procedures for officers. Further, UNDP collaborated with the Ministry of Justice and the Commission on Human Rights to enhance access to justice by establishing two regional justice hubs equipped to provide essential legal services.

One notable initiative in promoting the rule of law was UNDP's support for the establishment of a national legal aid system through the development of a Legal Aid Policy, which has established a Legal Aid Unit within the Ministry of Justice. UNDP supported the Legal Aid Unit in processes leading to the adoption of the Legal Aid Bill (2023) and the Legal Practitioners Act Amendment Bill. While the former has been endorsed by the Cabinet and submitted to Parliament, the latter is yet to be tabled in Parliament. In collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP is supporting the parliamentary review of the Legal Aid Bill through committee engagements. UNDP also organized strategic roadshows and media campaigns to raise public awareness about legal aid services. Additionally, UNDP provided mobile containers to the Manzini Magistrate Court with the aim of creating accessible centres for the provision of legal aid services. However, the mobile containers have yet to be partitioned and utilized since 2022. Unverified data from the country office shows that the Legal Aid Office served 67 clients (46 male; 21 female) between August and December 2023.

In another significant intervention, UNDP aided the operationalization of the Remote Remand System by conducting assessments, deploying hardware and software solutions, and training staff to manage the system. The initiative has contributed to the modernization of the justice system by enabling magistrates, correctional services, and other relevant parties to participate remotely in remand proceedings, thus reducing transportation costs by half, and enabling virtual weekly sessions for up to 40 cases.[48] UNDP facilitated benchmarking exercises for lessons learned from other jurisdictions and consultations, which led to the establishment of five Small Claims Courts that can provide affordable access to justice for resolving small debts. UNDP further supported the training of 41 commissioners and their support staff (29 female; 12 male) on court procedures to enhance their ability to deliver justice to citizens.

Overall, the rule of law initiatives have shown signs of promoting access to justice and contributing to the ongoing efforts to modernize the justice system. For instance, the establishment and operationalization of Small Claims Courts are reported to have improved access to justice for small businesses and individuals at minimal cost, without the need for legal representation.[49] However, there is limited tracking of the impact of these initiatives. While these interventions have been institutionalized within existing systems, challenges related to sustainability persist, particularly due to the movement of trained staff. For instance, many of the staff who benefitted from the training organized for the Royal Eswatini Police and the Correctional Service had left their positions by the time of the evaluation. Additionally, the current lack of a legislative framework poses a risk for the Legal Aid Unit, as without this framework, the unit only provides services such as legal information, advice, referrals, and mediation. It does not offer legal representation in court, pending the enactment of the necessary legislation.

Finding 7 – Digital services to improve public service delivery. UNDP has supported Eswatini's e-government agenda through several milestones in the past and in the current CPD through the development of the ICT Strategic Plan (2022–2027), a digital readiness assessment, and partnership with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to establish interoperable e-governance systems and innovation hubs. While the process has gained some momentum under the current CPD cycle, overall progress has been limited owing to lack of funding, fragmentation of IT initiatives within individual public institutions, and lack of coordination of e-government initiatives among different ministries.

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48 UNDP (2024), "Virtual Remand Hearings: Transforming Access to Justice in Eswatini," https://www.undp.org/eswatini/blog/virtual-remand-hearings-transforming-access-justice-eswatini.

49 UNDP Annual Report 2023, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-05/annual_report_2023_-_a_year_of_hope.pdf.

UNDP has been supporting the e-government agenda of Eswatini since 2004, when it helped the government to undertake a study to assess opportunities and challenges for electronic government.[50] Building on this, UNDP supported a scoping exercise in 2011 to assess the country's readiness for e-government, the development of Eswatini's e-government strategy in 2013, and e-government Operational Framework for Eswatini (2015–2019).[51] However, the strategy and operational framework were not implemented due to limited funding.

In the current CPD cycle, UNDP supported the Ministry of ICT in developing and launching the Information Communication and Technology Strategic Plan (2022–2027). UNDP also supported the Ministry in launching a digital readiness assessment, which is expected to inform the development of a new e-government strategy ('Government in Your Pocket'). Additionally, UNDP engaged the ITU to assist the Ministry of ICT in developing a one-stop-shop e-governance system that is interoperable. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry and ITU, with UNDP's financial support. A MoU was also signed between UNDP and the Eswatini Communications Commission to develop digital solutions aimed at improving public services and government functions, leading to the establishment of Innovation Hubs.

UNDP's work in this field has been challenging. Many specific ICT interventions are being pursued independently by different sector ministries, including those supported by UNDP and other development partners. For example, while the digital economy strategy was developed by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office with support from the World Bank,[52] a planned digital case management system by the Judicial Service Commission is expected to be implemented with UNDP's support, while yet another intervention has been planned for establishing legal empowerment hubs with the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and the 'Government in Your Pocket' with the Ministry of ICT. The national budget for ICT initiatives sits with individual ministries, and there is no coordination of these efforts. Another key challenge is the digital divide, especially in non-viable rural areas where commercial interests for Internet connection are limited. The lack of widespread access to smart devices limits the reach of these digital platforms.

2-3   Inclusive economic growth

This section presents specific findings related to the inclusive economic growth portfolio.

Finding 8 – Waste management. UNDP has contributed to shaping public perceptions in waste management from waste as an environmental burden to an economic opportunity. UNDP's interventions have helped to reduce single-use plastic bags, increase use of reusable bags, and introduced innovative waste management solutions.

In collaboration with the Eswatini Environment Authority and the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, UNDP Eswatini launched the Phatsa Sakho Nawe ('Bring your Own Bag') awareness campaign in November 2020, with the aim of reducing single-use plastic bags. Initially, the campaign required shoppers to bring their own bags or purchase reusable ones only on weekends, but it gradually expanded to more days of the week. The initiative also focused on building a circular economy by supporting local MSMEs, particularly rural women, in producing and selling reusable shopping bags. One of the project's successes was the production of over 20,000 reusable bags, generating nearly E120,000 (approximately $8,000) in sales within three months.[53]

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[50]   Government of Eswatini (2013), e-Government Strategy for the Swaziland: 2013 to 2017, https://www.gov.sz/images/eGov/e-Government-Strategy.pdf.
[51]   Government of Eswatini (2015), Operational Framework E-government Strategy for Swaziland 2015-2019, https://www.gov.sz/images/eGov/e-Government-Operational-Framework-2015--2019.pdf.
[52]   News on Africa (May 2023), "Eswatini government launches digital economy strategy," https://newsonafrica.com/sz/2023/05/06/eswatini-government-launches-digital-economy-strategy/.
[53]   UNDP (2021), "Women Generate Income As 'Phatsa Sakho Nawe' Gains Momentum," https://www.undp.org/eswatini/blog/women-generate-income-phatsa-sakho-nawe-gains-momentum.

The campaign sparked debate and led to subsequent UNDP-supported interventions in waste management policy. Following the campaign's momentum, the Waste Management for Improved Livelihoods and Resilience project conducted a comprehensive waste characterization study across all four administrative regions, including households, landfills, and dumpsites. A gap analysis of the legal, policy, and institutional frameworks was conducted to inform the development of the Integrated Waste Management and Pollution Prevention Strategy.

To encourage innovative waste management solutions, the project introduced an innovation challenge, awarding grants to MSMEs and NGOs for scalable ideas. These included initiatives such as composting food waste, textile recycling, and using waste substrates to produce oyster mushrooms. Out of 29 participants, eight winners were selected and provided with equipment to support the testing, prototyping, and scaling of their solutions. Additionally, the project offered capacity-building training to local governments, municipalities, and stakeholders on waste management techniques and business management.

While the initiative focused on addressing one stream of plastic waste, it contributed to the drafting of overarching legislation that aims to holistically tackle waste management in Eswatini. A bill banning plastic waste was set to take effect in December 2024. These interventions have led to a paradigm shift in the perception of waste, transforming it from an environmental burden into an economic opportunity. Notably, two waste buy-back centres were established in Manzini and Mbabane, providing households with a source of income while also reducing illegal dumping in the country. Stakeholder engagement revealed that UNDP interventions have led to noticeable behavioural changes, with citizens increasingly using reusable shopping bags.

Finding 9 – Access to clean energy. UNDP has supported renewable energy adoption initiatives that have shown signs of reducing carbon footprint and increasing the share of renewable energy within the country's electricity mix. Opportunity remains for UNDP to work with the government to address inadequate regulatory frameworks and to make a case for the viability of these initiatives to facilitate private sector participation and long-term success.

Access to clean and sustainable energy is a critical component of Eswatini's development agenda, as outlined in the National Energy Policy (2018) and the Kingdom of Eswatini Energy Masterplan 2034. The country currently imports about 80 percent of its power needs. Local financial institutions in Eswatini perceive renewable energy investments as high-risk, which limits domestic financial support for renewable energy projects, leading to a reliance on international funding and grants.[54] This is compounded by South Africa's energy crisis, which provides 64.5 percent of the country's energy, making Eswatini vulnerable to power shortages.

UNDP's Climate Promise Initiative has helped Eswatini to outline an ambitious goal to reduce emissions by 5 percent and to increase its renewable energy share of its electricity mix by 50 percent through investments in solar, wind, hydro, and biomass energy.[55] Additionally, UNDP provided technical support for the development of a Nationally Determined Contribution implementation plan, and supported the development of the Inclusive Budgeting and Financing for Climate Change report to help Eswatini to track climate-sensitive activities in public budgets and to reinforce climate resilience across all sectors.[56]

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54   United Nations in Eswatini (2023), "Status of Energy Security in Eswatini," https://eswatini.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/Status%20of%20Energy%20Security%20in%20Eswatini.pdf.
55   UNDP Eswatini (2021), "COP26: Eswatini Pledges to Increase Renewable Energy," https://www.undp.org/eswatini/news/cop26-eswatini-pledges-increase-renewable-energy.
56   UNDP (2023), "Eswatini puts climate action plan into action," https://www.undp.org/eswatini/press-releases/eswatini-puts-climate-action-plan-action.

To promote Eswatini's implementation of its climate promise, UNDP has supported various initiatives aimed at increasing the adoption of renewable energy technologies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and improving energy efficiency. A significant milestone in these efforts is the completion of a one-megawatt solar PV installation at the Raleigh Fitkin Memorial (RFM) Hospital, funded by the Italian Government. This solar plant supplies approximately 4.5 hours of the hospital's energy needs during the day and up to 10 hours at night, enhancing reliability during power outages. Together with energy-efficient upgrades, the installation reduces the hospital's carbon footprint by 536 tonnes of CO_2 annually.[57] A strategy has been developed to replicate the success of the RFM Hospital project across other hospitals and public institutions in Eswatini, along with plans to document and disseminate the benefits of improved access to clean energy. While the system includes a battery pack that stores some excess energy, regulatory support for integrating surplus electricity into the national grid is currently lacking. The initial sustainability of the facility is guaranteed by a three-year supplier warranty for maintenance and repairs, but there is no clear strategy for maintaining the system once the warranty expires.

Capacity-building was a key component of UNDP's initiatives to support the development of the renewable energy sector in Eswatini. In collaboration with the University of Eswatini's Centre for Sustainable Energy Research, UNDP has provided training programmes focused on equipping youth with skills in the installation, operation, and maintenance of solar energy technologies. The Powering Gender Equality project also aims at advancing women's participation in the renewable energy sector. The project has facilitated training of women entrepreneurs, including those with disabilities, to start renewable energy-related businesses.

Under the Africa Minigrid Programme, funded by the Global Environment Facility, UNDP is supporting pilot projects in the Mvundla and Bulimeni communities to serve as examples of how to create a conducive environment for private sector participation in renewable energy initiatives. To this end, an international consultant has been recruited to provide options for de-risking minigrid projects to attract private sector investment. Additionally, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with the Small Enterprises Development Company to conduct market research and promote small business development in project sites, with a specific focus on integrating women-owned businesses into the minigrid sector. A MoU with the Renewable Energy Association Eswatini has established a knowledge network to promote minigrid development across the country. The Greening the Central Bank of Eswatini project, which was starting at the time of the evaluation, aims at enhancing the bank's environmental sustainability through renewable energy integration, energy efficiency improvements, and exploring green financial instruments such as green bonds to fund eco-friendly initiatives.

Opportunity remains for the country office to work with the government to address policy regulations for off-grid renewable energy. The national regulatory framework for off-grid energy systems remains underdeveloped, with insufficient clarity on issues such as ownership transfer, maintenance, and operational responsibilities when integrating off-grid into the national grid. Additionally, the licensing process for small or off-grid systems is complex, and technical standards for minigrid connections are not yet fully established, posing challenges for private sector participation and scaling up.[58] While UNDP is working with the government through the Africa Minigrid Programme to de-risk the renewable energy investment to facilitate private sector participation, the viability of renewable energy projects continues to pose challenges for private sector participation. For instance, the first minigrid in Eswatini, at Mvundla, supplies power to only 21 households and is sustained through government subsidies. Although the market-based tariff was

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57   UNDP (2024), "3 ways to power Eswatini's path to energy security and sustainability," https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/3-ways-power-eswatinis-path-energy-security-and-sustainability.

58   Africa Energy Portal, https://africa-energy-portal.org/eri/country/eswatini.

set at E5 per kWh, consumers are currently paying E2 per kWh due to subsidies.[59] Hence, while the project is seeking to promote private sector participation, the current tariff-setting mechanisms and subsidy make minigrids less viable to private entities.

Finding 10 – Private sector development. UNDP has implemented both policy support and demonstration activities to promote private sector development in Eswatini. While some stakeholders expressed optimism about the potential of these interventions in boosting the private sector of Eswatini, the fragmentation of these private sector-focused interventions coupled with slow implementation poses challenges for overall effectiveness.

Given that Eswatini's economy is dominated by the public sector, UNDP has implemented several projects aimed at promoting private sector development, either directly or indirectly. Examples of such projects include the Accelerating Diversification and Private Sector Growth project; the Upscaling Market-Oriented Climate Smart Agriculture project; the Waste Management for Improved Livelihoods project; the Addressing Water, Health, and Poverty Nexus through WASH project; the Climate Change Responses in Eswatini; and the African Minigrid Programme. These initiatives included both policy development and demonstration activities.

At the policy level, UNDP supported the review of the 2008 MSME policy to stimulate domestic production, competitiveness, innovation, diversification, and economic inclusion. However, government approval of the revised policy has been delayed. Additionally, UNDP helped develop a draft national export plan to consolidate all external markets available to Eswatini and assist enterprises and MSMEs in accessing these markets. After supporting the development and advocating for the passage of the Citizen Economic Empowerment Act, UNDP is now helping in the development of regulations for the implementation of the Act. This Act, along with the associated regulations, aims to empower local citizens to actively participate in the economy by addressing regulatory and financing barriers that local businesses face.

UNDP is also supporting the development of a local certification scheme to enhance quality management practices, encouraging the formalization of informal businesses. To facilitate this, UNDP has provided a technical expert who is collaborating with the Eswatini Standards Authority on the development of the certification scheme. As of the time of the evaluation, 20 micro, small, and medium enterprises have been identified for the pilot phase of this scheme, which many stakeholders believe could be a game changer for small businesses by providing them with opportunities to meet expected standards, to access local stores, and to market their products. In another effort to address supply chain finance constraints in the agricultural sector, UNDP introduced the AgriFinTech Accelerator. This initiative aims to create a single point of integration for trade and supply chain finance within specific agricultural value chains, employing a 'Build, Operate, and Transfer' model. A consultant has been recruited and is working closely with UNDP and national counterparts, including the Central Bank of Eswatini, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Centre for Financial Inclusion, Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise, and the National Marketing Board to develop this model. The progress of these policies has been slow, and the trickle-down effect remains limited.

On the downstream side, UNDP is collaborating with various partners such as the Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO), the Royal Science and Technology Park (RSTP), the University of Eswatini Centre for Sustainable Energy Research, and the Eswatini Environment Authority on initiatives aimed at supporting MSMEs. These interventions include providing entrepreneurial skills and business management training, as well as inputs, starter kits, and seed capital for youth, women, and MSMEs. UNDP's work with the

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[59]   Outcome Evaluation of the Inclusive Growth Portfolio.

different institutions on private sector development lacked a coordination mechanism. Numerous activities could have been consolidated into a single, more cohesive project. There have been only a limited number of successful cases reported by the individuals and businesses supported by UNDP due to inadequate incubation and business management support.

Finding 11 – Youth employment. UNDP interventions to promote youth employment have shown mixed outcomes, with several weaknesses in design and silo implementation with partners. While these interventions have had limited focus on employment outcomes, they have served as valuable lessons that the country office is now using to redesign new interventions.

Youth unemployment remains one of the key development challenges in Eswatini, with 58.2 percent of the youth being unemployed.[60] To address this issue, UNDP has supported the implementation of several interventions, such as the Eswatini Youth Empowerment Programme, which helped young graduates between the ages of 18 and 35 to gain work experience, develop skills, and access job opportunities while earning a monthly stipend. The programme successfully placed 300 unemployed youth graduates in host organizations for a period of six months[61] and trained 359 across all four regions of the country in artisanal/ technical and vocational education and training.

 The initial pilot had many challenges, including limited private sector participation. Many private companies had their own internship programmes and were hesitant to take on the risks involved in offering internships to individuals they had not been involved in assessing and recruiting. Furthermore, the project design lacked a proper market assessment on the specific sectors where youth could find employment, and there were no alternative pathways for those who did not secure jobs after the internship. As of the time of the evaluation, the country office was in the process of redesigning the project based on the lessons learned, including a component on tracer studies that will help to track the impact of the programme. The model is now being used by the Construction Industry Council to deploy interns across the construction industry, with UNDP managing the process.

In addition, UNDP, in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Energy Research at the University of Eswatini, provided training for some youth on how to install household solar PVs and solar dehydrators for farming, as well as training in business planning and management. The expectation was that these youth would start their own renewable energy businesses after being provided a starter pack containing a solar dehydrator (for drying fruits and vegetables) and electrical toolboxes for installing solar panels. However, none of the trained youth started businesses, citing a lack of assistance and funding to incubate the business proposals they had developed. This was particularly striking considering that UNDP had other initiatives in collaboration with SEDCO and RSTP that could have provided incubation support for these youth. A second iteration of this training had been initiated as of the time of the evaluation, with a focus on empowering youth and women with green skills for the Nationally Determined Contributions Acceleration project.

In a similar intervention, UNDP also provided funding for SEDCO to train youth in small businesses, including honey processing and backyard gardening, among others. This intervention has shown minimal success. Specifically, the honey processing component failed due to group dynamics, as many of the youth left their villages shortly after receiving support. No screening was conducted to assess the genuine interest of the participants before they were given assistance. In another intervention, UNDP, in collaboration with SEDCO, established four Innovation Hubs, i.e., centres equipped to train youth in ICT skills. These hubs are also expected to serve as centres for business training and to support Eswatini's e-government initiative. The Innovation Hub is expected to be managed by a designated private operator from within the district

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60   UNICEF Eswatini, Country Office Annual Report 2023.
61   UNDP Eswatini, Annual Report 2023.

to ensure its sustainability. ESSECOM, a private company, is also expected to cover the cost of connectivity, while the private operator is anticipated to solicit grants and programme funds and to leverage the facility to train youth. Additionally, the hubs will be open for other entities to sponsor courses and other activities at the facility.

The overall design of these interventions has focused more on outputs, such as the number of interns or trainees, rather than on employment outcomes. UNDP missed the opportunity to foster collaborative partnerships among the various entities involved in implementing youth employment interventions. For example, the RSTP has facilities that could have been utilized by the Centre for Sustainable Energy Research to provide practical training for youth. On the other hand, the RSTP could have offered incubation support for youth start-ups in renewable energy and solar installation sectors. However, none of these synergies materialized, as UNDP worked in silos with these institutions. The country office had made progress to foster collaboration with other partners, such as the EU, that have been involved in youth employment initiatives in Eswatini. As of the time of concluding the evaluation, the country office had secured €820,000 from the EU to support MSMEs in green and renewable energy initiatives. This collaboration between the two entities could help reduce the risk of duplication of efforts and increase efficiency in the utilization of donor resources.

Finding 12 – Grant management. UNDP provided a number of different financing and grant initiatives across a range of projects, which helped to increase access to finance for MSMEs and individuals in Eswatini. Approaches varied, while selection, management, oversight, and follow up needed to be stronger .

Access to funding remains one of the key challenges facing the private sector in Eswatini. Estimates suggest that fewer than 30 percent of MSMEs have access to formal financial products, particularly from commercial banks, due to barriers such as high collateral requirements and stringent lending conditions.[62] In this regard, several UNDP projects, including Accelerating Diversification and Private Sector Growth, Upscaling Market-Oriented Climate Smart Agriculture, and Waste Management for Improved Livelihoods and Resilience, contained components aimed at improving access to finance for MSMEs and individuals.

For instance, to address the financing challenges among farmers, the Climate Smart Agriculture project established a revolving fund to assist farmers with capital for purchasing farm inputs and equipment. The fund, valued at $50,000, was administered by the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard) through its existing loan application system and was intended to help farmers acquire essential farming inputs such as seeds and fertilizers.[63] A total of 481 farmers (54 percent women; 46 percent men) accessed the loans, but due to the absence of effective repayment modalities and poor record management the loan repayment rate remained very low at 5 percent.[64] At the project's closure, the fund was depleted, leading to its discontinuation. Through the lessons from this initiative, and recognizing the ongoing need for financial support, NAMBoard and Eswatini Bank set up a new Credit Guarantee Fund of $113,000 in December 2022.[65] The credit guarantee, covering 15–20 percent of the loan amount, mitigates the need for farmers to provide their own collateral, making it easier for them to qualify for financing. Under the scheme, farmers can borrow up to $5,000 from Eswatini Bank as facilitated by NAMBoard and the National Maize Corporation.[66] Unverified information shows that the repayment rate of the fund set up by NAMBoard and Eswatini Bank is around 65 percent.

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[62]   Financial Management Trust, https://finmark.org.za/data-portal/SWZ/2018.
[63]   Final evaluation of the Increasing Farmer Resilience to Climate Change-Upscaling Market Oriented Climate Smart Agriculture project.
[64]   Assessment of the Climate-Smart Market-Oriented Agriculture project two years after project completion and feasibility of replication in other agro-ecological zones in Eswatini.
[65]   Inside Biz Magazine, "Eswatini Bank, National Maize Corporation, and NAMBoard Relaunch Horticulture Fund, Credit Guarantee Now At E2 Million," https://www.insidebiz.co.sz/templateeswatini-bank-nmc-and-namboard-relaunch-horticulture-fund-credit-guarantee-now-at-e2-million/.
[66]   Africa Press, "NAMBOARD, Eswatini Bank signs Memorandum of Understanding to improve production of fresh products," https://www.africa-press.net/eswatini/all-news/namboard-eswatini-bank-signs-memorandum-of-understandingto-improve-production-of-fresh-products.

In a related intervention, UNDP provided funding to the Royal Science and Technology Park to support 29 start-ups through incubation and handholding, with each receiving $7,500. Seven of these start-ups terminated their contracts, leaving 22 still active. However, as of the time of the evaluation no data was available on how many of the remaining start-ups are profitable, revealing weaknesses in the follow-up mechanisms and business management support offered to these enterprises.

Under the Waste Management for Improved Livelihoods project, UNDP awarded grants of up to $35,000 to six beneficiaries to launch or scale existing income-generating waste management initiatives. Additionally, smaller grants of between $2,700 and $4,000 were awarded to eight beneficiaries to test their ideas with the aim of eventually developing them into viable businesses. However, none of the MSMEs that received grants under the project have scaled up as intended. The evaluation found limited evidence of a viable business case among these grant recipients and noted concerns about the long-term sustainability of their ventures. For example, one business generates about $100 in monthly revenue but pays $50 in rent to the municipality for a small plot of land housing their glass recycling machine.[67] Another instance involved apprentices working on refurbishing classroom desks who were unable to sustain their business after project support ended, mainly due to a lack of financial literacy and business management skills. In these cases, grant money was spent before UNDP could provide the necessary technical support for developing a sustainability plan. Thus, sustainability plans that were developed with additional resources from UNDP remain unimplemented.

Gaps were observed in the business assessment and selection process for these grant recipients. Many grant recipients realized shortly after receiving funds that they were not engaged in the businesses they wanted to pursue. There was also insufficient private sector involvement, as these grant processes were primarily administered by government agencies lacking an investment-oriented mind-set. Furthermore, several businesses expressed concerns that the funding and support timeframe was too short. The evaluation also found instances of inefficiency, with one business receiving grants under both the Waste to Livelihood project and the RSTP initiative simultaneously.

Finding 13 – Improving farmers' resilience to climate change. UNDP supported climate smart agriculture in Eswatini by training farmers in climate-smart agriculture, providing equipment, and linking them to markets. However, these interventions had limited outcome and did not serve as an example of how farmers' resilience to climate change can be strengthened in Eswatini.

Three projects implemented by UNDP under the Inclusive Growth portfolio focused on increasing farmers' resilience to climate change. These projects were Climate-Smart Market-Oriented Agriculture, India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA), and Accelerating Private Sector Diversification. They share three common features: training farmers in climate-smart agriculture, providing them with inputs and equipment, and linking them to local markets.

The main project, Climate-Smart Market-Oriented Agriculture, aimed to enhance agricultural productivity and income for 500 households by promoting climate-smart agricultural practices, improving water management, and linking farmers to markets. The project covered two main areas: (i) Mavulandlela and the broader Northern Rural Development Area (RDA); and (ii) Ntamakuphila and the broader Ngwemphisi RDA. The project encountered design and implementation challenges that affected its effectiveness and overall efficiency. The field assessment for this project was conducted after the project proposal had been approved. Consequently, the findings from the field assessments, including more accurate cost estimations for project activities, were not incorporated into the project design. This oversight led to an underestimation

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of many project activity costs, ultimately resulting in many activities not being completed due to budget constraints. For instance, a key component of the project was to improve climate resilience through water-saving techniques by converting 60 hectares of land to water-efficient drip irrigation in the two community schemes: Intamakuphila and Mavulandlela. However, none of these initiatives were completed as intended.

At Intamakuphila, the drip irrigation system was partially implemented but never fully functional. Although some components were installed, the system worked for less than a week after being handed over to the beneficiaries. This failure was attributed to several factors, including poor planning, lack of proper engineering oversight, and insufficient training for beneficiaries on how to operate and maintain the system. The system quickly became non-functional due to issues such as sedimentation of the water sources and improper design. This left the farmers unable to sustain their agricultural activities, and many eventually abandoned the project.

At Mavulandlela, the drip irrigation system was not installed at all. Poor planning resulted in the installation of the irrigation system being delayed until late in the project timeline, by which point there were insufficient funds to complete the work. Although water pumps and some infrastructure were provided, the absence of a functional drip irrigation system left farmers without the means to produce crops. Like Intamakuphila, the farmers were not consulted on the irrigation design, and significant issues arose regarding the suitability of the designs for local conditions. As a result, the farmers at Mavulandlela reverted to using furrow irrigation to maintain some level of agricultural production, but this method was inefficient and unsustainable.

Weak project management exacerbated the situation. The Project Management Unit lacked key technical expertise, such as engineers, to oversee the implementation of critical systems such as irrigation. This resulted in the reliance on external contractors without proper oversight. Furthermore, the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation meant that progress was not tracked, emerging issues were not addressed in a timely manner, and corrective action was not taken during implementation. Similar to the irrigation installation, the revolving fund established under the project was not adequately monitored, leading to its collapse before the end of the project. Various training and capacity-building components fell short of project targets, including training farmers in conservation agriculture practices, using tractor-drawn equipment, improving product quality, developing business management skills, and maintaining irrigation systems.

The farmers' conditions seem to have worsened as parts of the old furrow irrigation facilities were damaged during the installation of the non-functional drip irrigation system in Intamakuphila. Two years after the end of the project, many farmers were no longer engaged in commercial agriculture and were out of production altogether.[68] The absence of a sustainability plan further weakened the project's impact. There was no exit strategy in place to ensure continuity beyond the project's funding period. As a result, key assets such as cold storage facilities, irrigation systems, and mechanized conservation agriculture equipment were not maintained or utilized effectively after project closure, rendering them largely redundant.

Some of the challenges mentioned above were also observed in related projects focused on improving farmers' resilience to climate change. For instance, the IBSA project, implemented between 2022 and 2023, also aimed to contribute to farmers' resilience to climate change. The project supported rainwater harvesting systems to help farming households manage water more effectively and trained households on efficient irrigation methods, with some lead farmers receiving rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation systems. Despite some delays, targeted farmers received and planted vegetable seedlings. However, many activities aimed at supporting resilience, including the provision of vegetable seedlings, storage tanks, water

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[68]   Assessment of the Climate-Smart Market-Oriented Agriculture project two years after project completion and feasibility of replication in other agro-ecological zones in Eswatini.

harvesting gutters, drip irrigation, and farm inputs (such as fruit trees, organic fertilizers, and seedlings), were implemented towards the end of the project, raising concerns about sustainability. The terminal evaluation concluded that the project's impact would likely be minimal.

2.4   Cross-cutting areas of interventions

This section presents findings on cross-cutting areas of interventions related to gender, engagement with CSOs, partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation.

Finding 14 – Gender. UNDP made significant progress in mainstreaming gender across various programmes and supported several interventions that contributed to improving women's participation in decision-making and in the energy sector in Eswatini.

UNDP's contribution to addressing gender issues has seen some improvement since the previous ICPE. During 2021–2024, 40 percent of the programme's expenses ($4.1 million) was allocated to outputs aimed at achieving gender equality as a significant objective (GEN2), while 56 percent ($5.8 million) was directed towards outputs expected to contribute to gender equality in some way (GEN1). The Powering Gender Equality project was the only project that had gender equality and/or the empowerment of women as the primary focus (GEN3).

At the downstream level, UNDP integrated gender considerations in projects by setting specific gender-sensitive targets within individual project documents and ensuring that a reasonable number of project beneficiaries are women. For instance, women formed the greater proportion of grant beneficiaries across the climate-smart agriculture, the RSTP grant initiative, and waste-to-livelihood projects. The Africa Minigrids Programme is helping women develop enterprises that leverage the productive use of minigrids. In collaboration with two CSOs – Women in Trade and Development and Kwakha Indvodza – UNDP conducted human rights and gender equality awareness training for women, incorporating a livelihoods component. Over 300 adolescent girls and young women, particularly teenage mothers, were empowered on human rights/sexual reproductive health and economic empowerment through UNDP support to Women in Trade and Development, a local NGO. UNDP also conducted a training-of-trainers workshop for women and youth on peacebuilding and conflict prevention to help them participate in the peacebuilding process following the 2021 civil unrest.

At the policy level, UNDP supported the launch of the National Gender Policy and the Strategy to End Violence 2022–2027, and the development of sexual harassment and gender policies for the Royal Eswatini Police Service. Additionally, it assisted in conducting a gender conference to sensitize 200 police officers on key gender concepts, including gender mainstreaming. With UNDP support, 80 women were trained in how to participate in the political process, and 109 women took part in the national elections, with women's representation in both the Houses Assembly and the Senate increasing from 9 percent to 28 percent.[69] After the 2021 civil unrest, UNDP facilitated consultations for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Forty senior public prosecutors received training on issues affecting key populations and the application of gender-based violence principles in prosecutions. This training aimed to deepen their understanding of key population issues, enabling them to support equitable access to justice without discrimination, in alignment with the 2005 Constitution. Following the training, the Director of Public Prosecutions launched an action plan to further apply and expand upon the insights gained.[70]

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[69]   World Bank (2024), "Eswatini Gender Landscape."
[70]   UNDP Annual Report 2023.

Following a World Bank-funded gender audit that revealed that the energy sector in Eswatini is predominantly male, with women comprising only 24 percent of public sector staff and a mere 10 percent of technical staff, UNDP is implementing the recommendations of the audit through the Powering Gender Equality project, aimed at addressing gender disparities in the sector. The project adopts a comprehensive approach by tackling policy gaps, providing capacity-building and supporting women entrepreneurs to promote gender equality. Key achievements of the project include the development of three policy briefs focused on enhancing women's leadership, policy reform, and institutionalizing gender equality in the energy sector. UNDP is also creating a guiding tool for integrating gender equality into energy policies. The project has conducted various capacity-building and advocacy efforts, empowering women legislators and community leaders to advocate for policy changes. Women were empowered with skills and equipment in clean renewable energy technologies and energy innovative solutions-based entrepreneurship to help them establish businesses in the energy sector. The African Minigrid Programme targets women-owned enterprises, helping them leverage the productive use of minigrids. The project has already gained perception among community members that the focus is exclusively on women-owned businesses, thus increasing the likelihood of women benefiting from the project. The complementary interventions under the African Minigrid Programme and the Powering Gender Equality project are expected to drive transformative change in terms of women's participation in the energy sector.

Finding 15. Engagement with civil society. UNDP engaged CSOs on its Portfolio Boards and provided funding to some CSOs, which helped to create awareness on gender issues and promoted inclusion. However, there is an opportunity for UNDP to engage with CSOs on a more long-term basis that aligns with the strategic priorities of the CSOs.

Under the current CPD, UNDP envisioned partnerships with civil society organizations as one of its key implementation strategies. UNDP planned to engage CSOs in testing innovative solutions, creating evidence for scaling up, and supporting civil society efforts to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and international human rights treaties. Some efforts were made to address the findings from the previous ICPE regarding insufficient engagement with CSOs in the governance domain. UNDP's primary point of contact with CSOs was through the Coordinating Assembly of NGOs (CANGO), which served on the boards of both UNDP portfolios. As the first of its kind, CANGO's representation on the UNDP Portfolio Boards emphasized the importance of balancing government, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and civil society, with CANGO serving as a crucial intermediary.

Some CANGO members, including Women in Trade and Development (WITAD) and Kwakha Indvodza, received funding from UNDP to implement community-based interventions, such as promoting gender-sensitive policies, empowering rural women and youth through entrepreneurship, and encouraging the involvement of women in sectors such as trade and development. UNDP's work with these CSOs has helped raise awareness of human rights and promoted gender equality in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

UNDP funded community dialogue programmes focused on gender-based violence, HIV, and LGBTQ+ rights. The CO supported the LGBTQ+ community, particularly through the Gender-Based Violence Charter, which addressed issues of inclusion and sensitization within communities. It also collaborated with other organizations and coalitions to engage religious and traditional sectors in discussions about LGBTQ+ rights, although resistance persisted in some areas. While LGBTQ+ rights are not criminalized, societal pressure remains, making UNDP's advocacy for minority rights significant. Advocacy work included community dialogues aimed at increasing tolerance and reducing stigma.

UNDP involved CSOs in consultation processes in relation to policies, strategies, and legislative work. For instance, CSOs were included in consultations for the Marriages Bills to gather public views and opinions on the objectives of the bills. Similarly, in response to the 2021 civil unrest, UNDP conducted a series of consultations with key stakeholders, including CSOs, to facilitate their participation in the peacebuilding process, albeit with limited success. Through the GEF Small Grants Programme, UNDP is now engaging community-based organizations, including NGOs and CSOs, to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. In May 2024, UNDP invited community based organizations, NGOs, and CSOs to submit proposals for 15 projects in the GEF Small Grants Programme.

While CSOs such as Kwakha Indvodza and WITAD received some support from UNDP, overall engagement with civil society remains minimal. UNDP's engagement with CSOs in Eswatini, through its collaboration with CANGO, faces significant challenges, marked by limited and often ad hoc programmatic and financial support. Many CSOs felt excluded from UNDP's interventions, citing instances of unacknowledged proposals, restricted access to decision-making processes, and insufficient alignment with their strategic priorities. This gap in inclusive engagement undermines the effectiveness of UNDP's objectives, as collaboration with CSOs is crucial for transferring knowledge, building skills, and reaching marginalized communities.

Finding 16 – Partnerships. UNDP's partnerships in Eswatini have been instrumental in advancing the nation's development priorities. Collaborative efforts with government ministries, the private sector, and international donors have enabled the introduction of important interventions, and facilitated capacity-building and knowledge sharing, contributing to UNDP positive image in the country.

UNDP has established strong partnerships with various government entities (see Finding 1 and Finding 4). National partners often have existing work plans, which they leverage to solicit UNDP support; and UNDP has approached government partners to assist with or accelerate its own ongoing programmes. By actively seeking new partnerships with national actors and identifying existing programmes that can be supported, scaled, or accelerated, UNDP has challenged traditional power dynamics between 'donor' and 'recipient', reinforcing the idea that UNDP is a genuine partner in development.[71] Many of the national partners that were interview spoke positively of UNDP partnership and support, noting that without UNDP certain key interventions would not have been possible. Through partnerships with several national ministries and parastatal institutions, UNDP has contributed to enhanced institutional capacity, facilitated policy reforms, and advanced the achievement of the SDGs.

While the donor landscape in Eswatini is modest compared to other lower middle-income countries, UNDP has managed to secure partnerships and funding from various donors, such as the Global Environment Facility, the Italian Government (see Finding 2), and the EU. These partnerships have enabled UNDP to implement projects to support renewable energy development and climate change adaptation in Eswatini. UNDP Eswatini is trusted by both national partners and donors for managing interventions that involve substantial procurement needs, and for overseeing donor funds, due to its global network and robust procurement systems. However, opportunities remain for UNDP to improve coordination mechanisms within the donor community to align resources and optimize impact. For instance, the EU and UNDP are both rolling out youth employment programmes in 2024, presenting a potential area for collaborative effort.

While UNDP's engagement with the private sector remains limited, its collaboration with a few key entities, including Business Eswatini (the national Chamber of Commerce), facilitated productive interactions between businesses and the government, fostering dialogue on policy issues affecting the business environment. UNDP has also secured modest funding from private sector organizations, such as Coca-Cola,

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to support its interventions. This engagement has been instrumental in promoting policies aimed at economic diversification, notably through such initiatives as the Accelerating Diversification and Private Sector Growth project. UNDP's collaboration with MSMEs facilitated economic empowerment and job creation amid Eswatini's economic challenges.

Operating as part of a Delivering as One country office in Eswatini, UNDP shares premises and services with other UN agencies, which has facilitated both formal and informal engagements while reducing operational costs. For example, UNDP partnered with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and UNFPA to support peaceful elections and improve electoral outcomes for marginalized groups. Additionally, it collaborated with UNICEF and WFP to launch initiatives that involve youth in climate change policy and decision-making processes, such as the Youth Indaba in Agriculture, a summit co-convened with FAO, WFP, UNFPA, and UNICEF to promote agribusiness careers among young people.

In collaboration with Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNDP supported initiatives focused on human rights and social inclusion, including a multimedia campaign that encouraged women's participation in public processes. This campaign led to an increase in women in leadership roles, which, in turn, bolstered legislative action on issues such as gender-based violence. UNDP also worked with OHCHR to provide technical assistance for the development of a draft Human Rights and Public Administration Bill, aimed at aligning with the Paris Principles and strengthening the Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration. Through these efforts, UNDP played a role in enhancing governance, accountability, and inclusive participation in Eswatini.[72]

However, UNDP engagement with other UN agencies during this CPD cycle was generally ad hoc and focused on specific interventions for which joint programming was needed based on funding requirement. Following the 2021 unrest, Eswatini became eligible for support from the Peacebuilding Fund, with an estimated $2 million intended to aid UN agencies in addressing growing political instability and fostering an inclusive national dialogue. However, a lack of consensus within the UN Country Team on certain elements of the proposed intervention delayed the preparation of the proposal, ultimately resulting in a missed opportunity to secure the funds. This setback, to some extent, weakened the peacebuilding and conflict management efforts of the UN in Eswatini.

Finding 17 – Monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Monitoring and evaluation in UNDP Eswatini continue to be a significant challenge, as noted in the previous ICPE. There was limited tracking of key indicators, risks, and assumptions, thus impacting progress measurement and accountability. Monitoring and evaluations were confined to projects with mandatory requirements with insufficient oversight, causing inefficiencies.

As found during the last ICPE, monitoring and evaluation continue to be an issue in the CO. The application of results-based management principles by the CO showed significant weaknesses. The evaluation identified systematic challenges with the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function of the CO. Notably, there was no dedicated staff responsible for M&E until the second quarter of 2024. This absence hindered the CO's ability to capture data to inform adaptive management and the programming of new interventions, thus impacting overall results. Individual project reporting was limited to donor funded projects with mandatory reporting requirements. As such, the few progress reports that were available for this evaluation were related the Inclusive Growth Portfolio, which had a number of donor funded projects.

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72   Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Human Rights Report 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/ohchr-reports/ohchr-report-2023.pdf.

The monitoring and evaluation plan developed to support implementation of the CPD was not implemented. Key assumptions, risks, and programme indicators were not systematically tracked to gather evidence for adaptive management. This has affected the ability to document progress and ensure accountability across all UNDP supported initiatives. For instance, only one monitoring visit was made to the site of the grant beneficiaries under the Waste for Livelihoods project, and the project for improving farmer resilience to climate changed failed partly due to the lack of oversight.

The outcome evaluation of the Governance Portfolio also described the third party and implementation partner reporting to UNDP as irregular, with reports compiled based on activities but lacking structured follow-up or acknowledgment from UNDP. Although a reporting template existed, some partners advocated for more structured reporting mechanisms and proactive engagement to ensure effective communication and accountability. Knowledge management and storage of documents at the CO was also marred with challenges. Files and documents were often filed unsystematically, in personal rather than centralized or shared drives, and labelled without clear protocol. This resulted in documents not being readily available to evaluation team members, leading to unnecessary time spent searching for essential information. Some partners expressed concerns that activity reports were not thoroughly reviewed or acknowledged, with important insights and context sometimes overlooked or oversimplified in UNDP and/or Results Group reporting.

Evidence also suggests weaknesses in the evaluation activities of the CO. Of the five decentralized evaluations conducted during the period under review (excluding the two portfolio outcome evaluations), all were project evaluations with third-party funding, which required mandatory evaluations as part of the funding agreement. As such, all the projects that were evaluated were under the Inclusive Growth Portfolio, with no specific project evaluation conducted under the Governance Portfolio except an outcome evaluation. Although the CO had a limited budget for evaluations, two outcome evaluations of the two portfolios were conducted around the time of the mandatory Independent Country Programme Evaluation. While these evaluations provided useful information for the ICPE, conducting them closer to the end of the CPD rather than mid-term limited their utility for adaptive management. Additionally, two projects funded by the Government of Italy, with one common objective, have two separate terminal evaluations planned, even though both projects could have been covered under one terminal evaluation. The CO could have optimized the use of its limited resources and enhanced adaptive management practices.

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

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

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Relevance and strategic positioning. UNDP's positive image and comparative advantage in Eswatini helped it to establish partnerships with several national partners to tackle several development challenges in the country. UNDP's interventions under the current CPD have been aligned with Eswatini's development goals, focusing on governance, green growth, and sustainable livelihoods. Its adaptability was evident in peacebuilding efforts following the 2021 civil unrest, and it helped mainstream SDG priorities, supporting Eswatini's SDG rescue agenda.

UNDP's added value and comparative advantage in Eswatini are reflected in its strategic positioning and collaboration with key national institutions. Known for its positive image, UNDP leveraged its integrator role in joint programming to foster partnerships with institutions such as the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Parliament, and the Ministry of Justice, enhancing national capacity to tackle diverse development challenges in Eswatini. UNDP's activities in Eswatini under the current CPD have been relevant and aligned with the revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and the country's broader goals of ensuring good governance as the foundation for economic recovery, green growth, and sustainable livelihoods as established in the National Development Plan (2023/2024–2027/2028).

UNDP's ability to adapt to changing development needs and priorities in Eswatini is evident through the recalibration of governance interventions to the challenges brought by the 2021 civil unrest. UNDP was initially quick to respond to the civil unrest and has worked in various areas, to some effect, in bringing about momentary peace. UNDP has played a significant role in mainstreaming the SDG priorities into the national development and budgeting systems. This is partly evidenced in Eswatini's formulation of the SDG rescue plan, and the establishment of a Parliamentary Subcommittee on the SDGs to provide oversight on integration of SDGs across all sectors in the country. UNDP implemented several interventions that responded directly to the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and farmers. UNDP's interventions promoted inclusion and women's empowerment, with a focus on addressing systemic barriers that women and gender groups face in the energy sector.

UNDP Eswatini streamlined its portfolios from three in the previous CPD cycle to two in the current CPD cycle, which helped reduce overlap and strengthen alignment with national priorities. Portfolio Boards were established with diverse representation resulting in some strategic oversight, addressing some implementation challenges and efficiency in resource allocation. However, limited synergy and adaptive management between governance and inclusive growth initiatives constrained the full potential for cross-sectoral impact and continuous learning.

Conclusion 2: Effectiveness and quality of results. The effectiveness of UNDP interventions in achieving intended outcome results has been mixed, with positive outcomes seen in waste management, renewable energy, and some rule of law initiatives. However, policy-level interventions face significant risks of non-implementation; while downstream projects, including those for climate resilience, youth employment, and MSME grants, showed limited impact due to weaknesses in design and oversight.

The effectiveness of UNDP interventions in achieving expected CPD outcomes has been mixed, with most interventions showing limited impact. Anecdotal evidence suggests that interventions in waste management, renewable energy, and the rule of law have yielded some positive outcomes. For instance, the Phatsa Sakho Nawe ('Bring Your Own Bag') awareness campaign and the Waste Management for Livelihood

project led to a bill banning single-use plastics, a shift in the perception of waste from an environmental burden to an economic opportunity, and increased use of reusable shopping bags. The installation of a solar PV system at Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital and the ongoing African Minigrid Programme have demonstrated renewable energy models for public institutions, while contributing to a reduction in the carbon footprint. Similarly, rule of law interventions – including the establishment of the Legal Aid Unit, the Small Claims Court, the remote remand system, and the Commercial Court – have contributed to improved access to justice. UNDP's support to the Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS), including the facilitation of workshops, conferences, and the Tax Inspectors Without Borders Initiative, contributed to enhancing the capacity of ERS staff, leading to an increase in domestic revenue mobilization.

While policy-level interventions supported by UNDP – primarily in the form of bills, policies, strategies, and frameworks – helped to enhance UNDP's relationship with national partners and laid a foundation for its work going forward, it has also raised considerable expectations for implementation support from UNDP. Many downstream interventions, including those focused on improving farmers' resilience to climate change, youth employment, and grants to MSMEs and individuals, achieved limited results due to weaknesses in project design, implementation, and oversight. There were few instances where project results and lessons were collected and disseminated among stakeholders, causing many demonstration projects to fail as catalysts for broader change. Duplicated efforts were made through different projects to implement similar concepts without sufficient effort to harness lessons for improving subsequent interventions.

Conclusion 3: Participatory and inclusive development. UNDP contributed to inclusive and participatory development through intervention focused on the private sector, women economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and some support for CSO-led interventions. While some progress was made in promoting private sector development, delays in policy approvals and limited coordination among initiatives hindered expected outcomes. Support for civil society organizations in gender equality, human rights, and LGBTQ+ inclusion faced similar limitations, as UNDP's engagement with CSOs lacked a clear strategy and long term focus.

UNDP implemented downstream interventions along with policy support for the MSMEs to promote private sector development. Many of the downstream interventions in this regard aimed at creating economic opportunities for youth, women, and other vulnerable groups, such as grants for MSMEs, training of women and youth together with start-up kits, and funding for farmers. Despite these efforts, delays in policy approvals and the absence of coordination among UNDP's private sector related initiatives has led to fragmentation, limited implementation, and slowed tangible outcomes. Challenges remain for supported MSMEs to achieve success, partly due to insufficient incubation and business management support.

UNDP integrated gender issues in most of its interventions and implemented specific interventions focused on promoting female empowerment and fostering socio-economic opportunities for women. UNDP's policy level interventions, such as the National Gender Policy, the Strategy to End Violence, and gender-focused policies within the police service, contributed to efforts to address gender-based violence. Through the training of women for political participation and peacebuilding in Eswatini, UNDP contributed to women's participation in decision-making.

UNDP provided financial support to some CSO-led interventions that promoted gender equality, human rights, and LGBTQ+ inclusion, especially in areas facing societal resistance. However, engagement with CSOs remains limited, with concerns about a predominantly government-focused approach. UNDP had no clear strategy for engaging civil society groups. The planned national dialogue, intended as a platform for government and non-government actors to come together and deliberate on governance issues, did not

materialize due to the government's preference for a more traditional format. Lack of consensus among UN agencies in Eswatini led to a missed opportunity for accessing the Peacebuilding Fund, which could have been used to support political stability and an inclusive national dialogue.

Conclusion 4: Sustainability. The sustainability of UNDP interventions has been mixed, with many policy level interventions and downstream interventions showing limited sustainability. Financial sustainability remains the biggest concern, as UNDP's reliance on donor funding and the lack of replication of downstream demonstration interventions limit long-term impact.

While it is challenging to quantify the net environmental impact of UNDP's interventions, the overall outlook on sustainability from an environmental perspective is positive. Key initiatives, such as the Greening of the Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital demonstration, the Africa Minigrids Programme, and the upcoming Greening the Central Bank of Eswatini project, promote access to renewable energy. These projects not only support the creation of an enabling environment and policy framework but also enhance the participation of women and the private sector in renewable energy. However, policy development needs to keep pace with ongoing efforts to promote private sector participation in the energy sector.

From a social perspective, there is a high level of ownership and involvement in policy-level work. However, the true test of sustainability lies in policy and strategy implementation, as many past policies developed by national partners have remained on paper, with limited execution on the ground. The frequent movement of trained staff within Eswatini's national institutions presents a significant risk to the sustainability of UNDP's interventions. In some cases, trained individuals did not remain within the targeted institutions long enough to fully apply and transfer their skills to colleagues.

Financial sustainability also poses a significant threat to the long-term impact of UNDP's interventions. The country office has limited regular resources to continue and scale up pilot projects, while there has been limited replication and scaling up of downstream interventions by the government. The limited success of these downstream interventions has made it difficult to capture the attention of national stakeholders and donors. Despite the training provided, many beneficiaries of UNDP interventions targeting MSMEs lack the business acumen needed to sustain their enterprises independently.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: UNDP needs to focus on supporting the government on converting supported policies and strategies into practical, on-the-ground implementation while consolidating its efforts into fewer, interconnected projects for greater impact.

UNDP has supported several pieces of legislation, policies, and strategies during the current CPD cycle. However, policies and strategies alone cannot bring about change. There is a need to focus on supporting the government with the programmatic aspect of converting these policies into practical implementation on the ground. Due to resource constraints and the limited capacity of the country office, UNDP should engage the government in selecting a few strategic and interconnected projects to support in the coming cycle, which will allow for a more demonstrable impact. Several UNDP projects, for instance, focusing on private sector and MSMEs, could be consolidate under one overarching and comprehensive programme with a clearer Theory of Change. UNDP needs to shift from providing fragmented annual support to partners and instead focus on more strategic, multi-year interventions that can be phased annually.

Equally, UNDP needs to capture synergies in its working relationship with national partners. For instance, stronger synergies are needed among institutions involved in UNDP's youth employment interventions. Additionally, UNDP should strengthen the complementarities between upstream and downstream interventions, as demonstrated by its work in the waste management sector and the ongoing African Minigrid Programme.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should strengthen its support to CSOs to facilitate their role in advancing the sustainable development goals.

UNDP has provided support to some CSOs, which has shown signs of promoting human rights and empowering marginalized groups. There is significant room for UNDP to strengthen its engagement with CSOs as their contributions are vital to the achievement of the SDGs and broader social strategies. UNDP needs a comprehensive strategy that ensures effective and strategic engagement with non-government actors. It is also essential for UNDP to work with other UN agencies to identify and promote areas where diverse stakeholders – government and non-government – can work together to drive sustainable development.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should collaborate with national partners to strengthen project management, monitoring and evaluation, and outcome-level reporting through the development and implementation of actionable activities with clear responsibilities and capacity-building for both UNDP staff and implementing partners.

UNDP needs to strengthen its internal project management approaches, including how it monitors and reports on its interventions. Monitoring and evaluation plans and activities should be integrated into all UNDP interventions, with clear responsibilities for tracking results specified for individuals within both UNDP and national partners. UNDP also needs to work with national partners to integrate best practices in results-based management into the work of national partners using the National Implementation Modality projects. Additionally, UNDP should strengthen internal and external capacity for project management, monitoring, and evaluation through training for relevant country office staff and national partners. UNDP needs to strengthen how it captures and uses lessons learned from past projects to influence ongoing and subsequent interventions.

Recommendation 4: UNDP should further work with the Resident Coordinator's Office and the UN Country Team to explore possible approaches of working with the government to consolidate ongoing efforts to address the underlying causes of the 2021 civil unrest and to ensure peace in Eswatini.

UNDP should enhance its collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and the UN Country Team (UNCT) to develop and implement effective strategies for addressing the economic, social, and governance challenges that contributed to the civil unrest in Eswatini in 2021. This collaboration should focus on improving internal coordination, resource efficiency, and the optimization of multidisciplinary skills to create a synergistic approach that amplifies the collective impact of UN agencies. Additionally, UNDP should work with the RCO to strengthen conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives by addressing the underlying factors threatening peace and stability in Eswatini. Future programmes should include elements to promote social cohesion, foster political stability, and support sustainable development.

Recommendation 5: UNDP Eswatini should enhance its grant management through the use of investment-oriented criteria in the selection process, as well as structured follow-ups and performance-based milestones.

The country office needs to strengthen its grant management process. Selection processes should involve criteria that ensure that there are business cases for the interventions selected for the grant. Partnering with financial institutions and private sector actors such as MTN and Standard Bank with a similar grant programme could foster an investment-oriented approach and the sharing of experience on best practices within the Eswatini context. Structured follow-up mechanisms, performance-based milestones, and continuous technical assistance should be integrated into funding support together with a centralized grant registry to help prevent inefficiencies and overlaps.

3.3   Key recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1. ✅

UNDP needs to focus on supporting the government on converting supported policies and strategies into practical, on-the-ground implementation while consolidating its efforts into fewer, interconnected projects for greater impact.

Management response: Accepted 💬

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Conduct a review of ongoing projects to identify overlapping areas and opportunities for consolidation, and adopt a portfolio-based programming approach to develop collaborative solutions addressing strategic development challenges effectively.	March 2026	DRR		
1.2 Ensure policy and strategy development is accompanied by programmatic support for effective implementation.	December 2027	Programme specialists		

RECOMMENDATION 2. ✔

UNDP should strengthen its support to CSOs to facilitate their role in advancing the sustainable development goals.

Management response: Accepted •••

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Develop a cohesive CSO engagement strategy, integrating long-term support and capacity-building, and establishing regular consultation mechanisms fostering stronger collaboration and sustainable development outcomes.	December 2025	DRR and relevant specialists		
2.2 Undertake a CSO Call for Proposals in line with new CPD priorities with a view of identifying CSO responsible parties for implementation and advocacy.	March 2026	DRR		
2.3 Undertake a CSO strengthening programme focused on capacity-building for CSOs.	March 2026	Programme specialists		
2.4 Support the creation of an enabling environment for CSOs for the effective discharge of their roles in promoting transparency and encouraging inclusive decision-making.	June 2027	Governance programme specialists		

RECOMMENDATION 3. ✔

UNDP should collaborate with national partners to strengthen project management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and outcome-level reporting through the development and implementation of actionable activities with clear responsibilities and capacity-building for both UNDP staff and implementing partners.

Management response: Accepted •••

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Provide at least one training on results-based reporting and M&E best practices for partners and UNDP staff.	July 2027	PMSU/DRR		
3.2 Integrate M&E activities into project design, and ensure regular tracking of progress and outcomes.	December 2026	PMSU/DRR		
3.3 Invest in impact measurement and monitoring at portfolio level.	September 2027	PMSU/DRR		
3.2 Integrate M&E activities into project design and ensure regular tracking of progress and outcomes.	December 2027	Programme specialists		
3.4 Implement a system for capturing and using lessons learned from past projects to inform ongoing and future interventions.	December 2025	PMSU/DRR		
3.5 Regularly review and adjust project plans based on M&E findings to ensure continuous improvement and impact.	December 2025	PMSU/DRR		

RECOMMENDATION 4. ✔

UNDP should further work with the RCO and UNCT to explore possible approaches of working with the government to consolidate ongoing efforts to address the underlying causes of the 2021 civil unrest and to ensure peace in Eswatini.

Management response: Partially Accepted. •••

Though there is the need for addressing the underlying causes of the civil unrest, progress in this area is highly dependent on the government's willingness to engage.

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 UNDP will continue to work on strengthening collaboration with RCO and UNCT to address the underlying causes of the 2021 civil unrest and to ensure peace, especially towards the election periods.	December 2028	RR		
4.2 UNDP will actively engage with RCO and UNCT to ensure that the next UNSDCF (2026–2030) as well as the CPD for the same period addresses underlying causes of the 2021 civil unrest to ensure peace in Eswatini.	December 2025	RR		

RECOMMENDATION 5. ✔

UNDP Eswatini should enhance its grant management through the use of investment-oriented criteria in the selection process, as well as structured follow-ups and performance-based milestones.

Management response: Accepted •••

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Establish a CO Grant Committee with oversight of granting processes in the CO with clear ToRs and guidelines.	December 2025	DRR		
5.2 Create a centralized database to track all grantees and their projects, and include information on their capacity, past performance, and areas of expertise.	December 2026	PMSU		
5.3 Engage with other institutions providing grants in Eswatini to explore best practices and share experiences.	December 2025	PMSU		

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/24417

Annex 1. Evaluation terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation matrix

Annex 3. Eswatini at a glance

Annex 4. UNDP Eswatini country office at a glance

Annex 5. Project list

Annex 6. Documents consulted

Annex 7. Status of country programme outcome and output indicators matrix

Annex 8. Performance rating

Annex 9. Policies, bills, strategies, and reports supported by UNDP

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