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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION ERITREA



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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability
responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT
HUMAN COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP efficiency
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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: ERITREA

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ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
AWP	Annual Work Plans
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoSE	Government of the State of Eritrea
HDI	Human Development Index
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
LLM	Master of Laws
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoFND	Ministry of Finance and National Development
MoI	Ministry of Information
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MW	Megawatt
NCEW	National Confederation of Eritrean Workers
NDP	National Development Plan
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NSO	National Statistics Office
NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
NUEYS	National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students
OAG	Office of the Auditor General
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGP	Small Grants Programme
UN	United Nations

UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews
WHO	World Health Organization

Evaluation Brief: Eritrea

Eritrea, situated in the Horn of Africa, has a population of about 3.75 million, with nearly three-quarters residing in rural areas. The demographic profile is predominantly young. Since gaining independence in 1993, the country has maintained a consistent political structure and a strong emphasis on self-reliance. Eritrea is divided into six administrative regions and is characterized by social structures that support local governance and development efforts.

Eritrea's economy is largely based on subsistence agriculture and mining, with state-owned enterprises playing a significant role. At the same time, challenges persist in data infrastructure, digital access and climate vulnerability. Human development indicators have shown steady improvement, but poverty and vulnerable employment remain widespread, especially among women and rural populations. The country has also experienced shifting diplomatic relations, moving towards greater engagement with regional and international partners, and is currently formulating a new National Development Plan to guide future progress.

The current Country Programme (2022–2026) was aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and with Eritrea's indicative National Development Plan 2014–2018, which remains the primary framework for national priorities, with a focus on sustainable economic growth, institutional strengthening and improved well-being for all citizens. This evaluation covers both the current (2022–2026) and previous programme cycles (2017–2021), reflecting the evolution of interventions and long-term results.

The UNDP Eritrea Country Programme across the two cycles was structured around three main portfolios: Governance and Institutional Strengthening, where UNDP worked to build the capacities of key public institutions and supported improvements in public service delivery; Inclusive and Sustainable Livelihoods, where UNDP expanded livelihood opportunities for vulnerable groups; and Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Climate Resilience, where UNDP supported ecosystem restoration, renewable energy and climate adaptation.

Findings and conclusions

UNDP remained a critical and trusted partner in Eritrea's development landscape. This trust was anchored in UNDP's responsiveness to the national context, its physical presence and its ability to mobilize resources and partnerships. Strong ownership and coordination with the Government of Eritrea, through the Ministry of Finance and National Development, ensured that UNDP initiatives were well aligned with national priorities and complemented the work of other United Nations agencies and development partners. However, there remained scope for UNDP to strengthen joint programming.

UNDP delivered tangible results across multiple sectors, despite operating in a resource-constrained environment. Its most visible achievements were in institutional capacity strengthening, livelihoods improvement, biodiversity conservation and energy access. UNDP's support helped build the skills and systems of key national institutions such as the justice sector, the Office of the Auditor General and the National Statistics Office. It also played a pivotal role in revitalizing national planning and data systems, supporting the development of Eritrea's first comprehensive National Development Plan and improving the country's statistical capacities. In livelihoods, UNDP's targeted interventions provided skills development, entrepreneurship support and rural livelihood enhancement, especially for women and youth. However, the ability to scale up these interventions was limited by time-bound and project-based funding.

UNDP's work in climate resilience and natural resource management contributed to ecosystem restoration and improved inclusion, particularly among women and rural populations. Its investments in renewable energy and grid extension improved access to electricity, with short- to medium-term sustainability supported by national capacity and ongoing partner engagement. The long-term sustainability of UNDP initiatives was mixed. Strong government ownership and community-led approaches supported continuity, but limited national funding and reliance on external support posed risks to long-term sustainability.

Recommendations for the next Country Programme

Recommendation 1: UNDP should strategically prioritize high-impact areas aligned with national priorities such as data systems, strengthening the energy grid through renewable energy, extending the energy grid, soil and water conservation, and climate action. These are areas that have multiplier effects on poverty reduction through increasing opportunities for both production and employment creation. In addition, UNDP should invest in systems approaches to accelerate SDG progress amid resource constraints.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should diversify and strengthen development financing by leveraging vertical funds such as the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund, and non-traditional sources including philanthropic foundations and international financial institutions, while supporting national resource mobilization capacity.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should strengthen national M&E systems and internal capacities to improve results tracking, evidence and data-driven decision-making, including strengthening the capacities of the MoFND and implementing partners, and the development of a national M&E framework that is aligned with the forthcoming NDP and linked to Agenda 2030 indicators.

Recommendation 4: UNDP should enhance its support for institutional capacity development in Eritrea by advocating for a shift from fragmented, project-based approaches to a more coherent and long-term strategy aligned with the forthcoming NDP.

Recommendation 5: UNDP should deepen its commitment to gender equality and LNOB by supporting inclusive institutional policies, scaling successful models and mainstreaming gender across all programmes.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



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

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to critically assess UNDP contributions to national development priorities and results. ICPEs are carried out within the provisions of the UNDP evaluation policy.¹ Under the ICPE framework, the evaluation team assesses UNDP contributions and the effectiveness of the UNDP Country Office's strategy towards achieving the development results articulated in its Country Programme Document (CPD).

The objectives of this ICPE were to support the development of the next Eritrea UNDP country programme by identifying best practices, results and key lessons learned from the current cycle; to strengthen UNDP accountability to national and international stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board; and to contribute to knowledge generation, organizational learning and decision-making within UNDP.

This ICPE was carried out in 2025 and focused on the period from January 2022 to the end of March 2025. However, many of the interventions implemented by UNDP, particularly those aimed at strengthening public institutions and promoting inclusive livelihoods and economic empowerment, dated back to the previous cycle (2017–2021).² The evaluation therefore covered both the previous and current CPD cycles, that is, eight years of programme implementation (2017–2025), to allow for an assessment of the evolution of the interventions, the longer-term results and how lessons were applied.

The ICPE covered all UNDP activities in the country and interventions funded by all sources, including UNDP's own resources, donor funds and government funds. It also covered non-project activities, such as coordination and advocacy, which played an important role in supporting the country's political and social agenda. This was the first country programme evaluation conducted by the IEO in Eritrea following the decentralized country programme evaluation carried out by the Country Office (CO) in 2020 with minimal IEO input.

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 Independent Evaluation Office. "UNDP Evaluation Policy." Available at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml>

² The outcomes of the 2022–2026 UNDP Eritrea CPD built on the foundational priorities established in the 2017–2021 CPD, maintaining strong thematic continuity across governance, inclusive economic growth and environmental sustainability. Both programme cycles prioritized (i) strengthening public institutions to enhance accountability and service delivery, (ii) promoting inclusive livelihoods and economic empowerment with particular attention to youth and women, and (iii) supporting sustainable environmental management and resilience to climate shocks. Assessing UNDP initiatives across both CPDs was therefore important to understand the evolution of programming, trace progress over time, assess the uptake of past lessons and determine whether previous efforts laid a foundation for current interventions.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation based its analysis on the outcomes presented by the country programme for the period 2017–2025. It reviewed each of the planned outcomes and their links to the programme’s strategic objectives. UNDP country programme effectiveness was evaluated through an analysis of progress towards the expected outputs and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the expected UNDP country programme outcomes.

To better understand UNDP’s performance and the sustainability of results, the ICPE examined specific factors that influenced the country programme either positively or negatively. UNDP capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to national development needs and priorities was also examined. The evaluation sought to answer four evaluation questions (see Box 1).

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

To answer the evaluation questions, the evaluation team collected, analysed and triangulated data through the following methods:

- Analysis of the full portfolio of projects and programmes, as well as a review of programme documents and reports on projects and programmes carried out by UNDP and the Government of the State of Eritrea (the GoSE), and other relevant documents.
- A preliminary interview with the outcome leads of the UNDP Eritrea CO and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa Country Oversight and Support Team to capture reflections on programme performance and results, and on major cross-cutting themes such as gender, partnerships and issues related to country programme design and implementation.
- Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with key stakeholders, involving a total of 121 participants (101 men and 20 women). Site visits were made to Adi Keih, Asmara, Damas, Embarda, Ghindae and Massawa.
- Evidence was triangulated with data from documentary review, interviews, focus group discussions and direct observations. Data were organized thematically to identify patterns and cross-validated across sources to assess consistency. The findings were then synthesized according to the evaluation matrix, which was underpinned by the main evaluation questions. Preliminary findings were validated with the CO to ensure accuracy while maintaining analytical independence.

The ICPE used the IEO’s rating system to assess the performance of the country programme against the criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Evidence was assessed against these parameters for each criterion, using a four-point rating scale (see Annex 7). The ICPE underwent a rigorous quality assurance process, first through an internal peer review at the IEO and then with two external reviewers. The report was subsequently submitted to the CO and the UNDP Regional Bureau for

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

⁴ The IEO’s Gender Results Effectiveness Scale classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative (results had a negative outcome that aggravated or reinforced gender inequalities and limiting norms); gender blind (results gave no attention to gender and failed to acknowledge the different needs of women, men, girls, boys and other marginalized populations); gender targeted (results focused on the number of women, men or marginalized populations reached); gender responsive (results addressed the differential needs of women, men and marginalized populations and focused on equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status and rights but did not address root causes of inequalities); and gender transformative (results contributed to changes in norms, cultural values, power structures and the roots of gender inequalities and discrimination).

Africa and, finally, to the GoSE and other partners in the country for review. The process concluded with a workshop held via videoconference, which brought together the main programme stakeholders and provided an additional opportunity to discuss the results and recommendations contained in this report.

1.3 Methodological limitations

Table 1 presents the challenges and limitations faced during the evaluation and the strategies adopted to address them.

TABLE 1: Limitations, Implications and Mitigation Strategies

Limitation	Implication	Mitigation Strategy
Incomplete or unavailable project documents	Hindered verification of project inputs, outputs and results; made it difficult to trace the evolution of interventions across programming cycles	Triangulated information through consultations with UNDP staff, implementing partners, government counterparts, donors and other UN agencies; prioritized interviews and site observations to validate findings
Limited ability to physically access project sites due to the short duration of the field mission, which in some cases was incompatible with the time required to acquire travel permits beyond 25 km outside Asmara	Limited direct observation and assessment of projects in remote or border areas	Collaborated with the UNDP CO and national authorities to obtain required travel permits; successfully visited project sites in and around Asmara and Massawa, where most projects were concentrated
Lack of up-to-date, comprehensive and disaggregated national statistics, and inconsistent programme-level monitoring data	Weakened the rigour of assessing UNDP's contributions to outcome-level results	Relied on triangulation and primary data collection to supplement gaps in monitoring data and statistical records

1.4 Country context

Eritrea is situated in the Horn of Africa, on the western shore of the Red Sea, with a total land area of approximately 124,320 km².⁵ The country's population was estimated at 3,748,901.⁶ About 74.8 percent of the population lives in rural areas.⁷

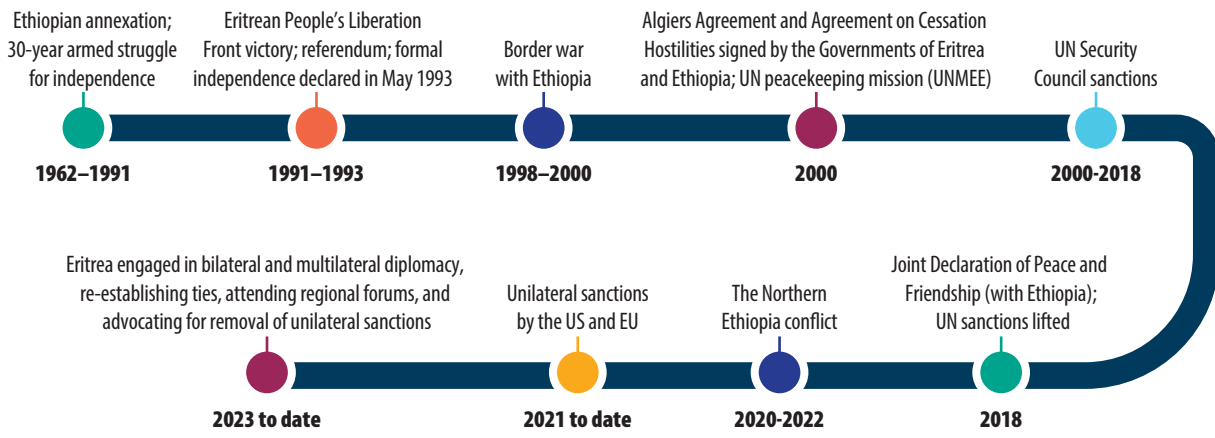
The country has maintained the same political structure since its independence from Ethiopia in 1993, operating as a one-party system governed by presidential decree. While national elections have not been held since independence, regional and local elections were conducted periodically.⁸ Eritrea operated a dual administrative system comprising national and regional (zoba) levels; the country is divided into six zobas.⁹

Eritrea's social structure is characterized by strong community ties, with nationalism deeply ingrained in society, promoting self-help and volunteerism. Eritrea's societal framework includes organizations such as the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) and the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW), which operate across all administrative levels, from national leadership to village structures.

Eritrea's development trajectory has been guided by the principle of self-reliance, with limited external influence. Eritrea has experienced a complex trajectory shaped by multiple conflicts and shifting regional dynamics (see Figure 1). The country faced a series of international sanctions, including those imposed by the UN Security Council from 2009 to 2018.¹⁰

The signing of landmark peace, friendship and cooperation agreements with Ethiopia in 2018, alongside the lifting of UN sanctions, marked a significant shift and helped refocus attention on Eritrea's development pathways. Since 2021, however, Eritrea has faced new unilateral sanctions from the United States and the European Union, which has posed challenges for Eritrea's access to development aid and financing.

FIGURE 1: Key Security Issues and Diplomatic Milestones in Eritrea



⁵ Government of the State of Eritrea. (2022). Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2022: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁶ 2023 projections, United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects 2022.

⁷ United Nations Eritrea. (2024). Annual Results Report 2024. UN Resident Coordinator's Office, United Nations Development System in Eritrea. Available at: https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/c7d05022-581f-4791-81ba-7584387908e9_2024%20Eritrea%20ARR%2012.pdf

⁸ African Development Bank. (2017). Eritrea – Interim Country Strategy Paper 2017–2019. Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: African Development Bank Group. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/>

⁹ World Bank. (2021). The World Bank in Eritrea. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/eritrea/overview>

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council. (2009). Resolution 1907 (2009) adopted by the Security Council at its 6254th meeting, on 23 December 2009 (S/RES/1907). [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1907\(2009\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1907(2009))

Eritrea's bilateral relations have increasingly shifted away from traditional Western partners towards closer engagement with countries such as China, Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates. In 2023, Eritrea's foreign policy saw a shift when the government proactively began engaging with the diplomatic community. Over the past two years, the country also reactivated its membership in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.¹¹

The national data infrastructure faced significant challenges. National accounts data and GDP figures relied on unofficial estimates.¹² Inflation data were limited to Asmara, and no full balance of payments accounts existed. Eritrea has not conducted a population census since independence, and the last demographic and health survey was carried out in 2010, resulting in outdated demographic data.¹³ Eritrea's Interim National Development Plan 2014–2019 has expired, and the formulation of a successor National Development Plan (NDP) began in 2025.¹⁴

Eritrea's human development trajectory remains below both the global average and the sub-Saharan Africa regional average. The country has made steady, incremental gains in its Human Development Index (HDI) since 2010, rising by about 8.2 percent from 0.465 in 2010 to 0.503 in 2023. However, the gap with the sub-Saharan Africa average has not closed, with Eritrea's HDI remaining roughly 0.06 points below the regional mean over the period.¹⁵ There were no reliable official data on income inequality in Eritrea.¹⁶ The national unemployment rate was 3.5 percent, but 57.4 percent of jobs were classified as vulnerable employment.¹⁷ This was more prevalent among women (69.4 percent) and rural residents (68.8 percent).¹⁸ The country continued to experience significant levels of emigration, particularly among youth and skilled professionals.^{19,20,21} The Eritrean diaspora remained an essential financial support to the country through a 2 percent diaspora tax and voluntary contributions from Eritreans abroad. In 2021, remittances totalled approximately US\$312 million, accounting for up to 20 percent of Eritrea's GDP.²²

Eritrea was classified as a low-income country.²³ The country's financial sector was small, entirely bank-based and owned by the State.²⁴ Eritrea's economy has experienced continuous fiscal challenges with moderate levels of revenue mobilization.²⁵ The economy was predominantly agrarian, with 65 percent of the

¹¹ Government of the State of Eritrea. (2024). Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2024: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

¹² World Bank. (2023). Eritrea Country Profile. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099046304262273085/pdf/IDU074886f8a01d02048580b6570bbd5bd73c4f9.pdf>

¹³ National Statistical Office.

¹⁴ African Development Bank Group. (2022). Eritrea Interim Country Strategy Paper (2022–2024) and 2021 Country Portfolio Performance Review. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/eritrea-interim-country-strategy-paper-2022-2024-and-2021-country-portfolio-performance-review>

¹⁵ UNDP. (2025). Human development indices: Statistical update 2025. In Human Development Report 2025 (Statistical Annex, Table 2: Human Development Index trends, 1990–2023). United Nations Development Programme. https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2025_HDR/HDR25_Statistical_Annex_HDI_Table.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Vulnerable employment, in the context of labour statistics, refers to the sum of self-employed individuals without employees and contributing family workers (unpaid family members working in a family business).

¹⁸ United Nations in Eritrea. (2021). The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework between the GoSE and the United Nations 2022–2026. Available at: <https://eritrea.un.org/>

¹⁹ UNHCR. (2024). Eritrea – Country Overview. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/eritrea>

²⁰ UNHCR Sudan. (2025). Eritrean Refugees in Sudan Dashboard (as of 30 June 2025). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/117604>

²¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2023). Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) in the East and Horn of Africa – 2023 Factsheet. IOM Regional Office for East and Horn of Africa. Available at: <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1701/files/documents/2023-10/mecc-ehoa-2023-factsheet.pdf>

²² United Nations Human Rights Council. (7 May 2024). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/24>

²³ African Development Bank Group. (2022). Eritrea Interim Country Strategy Paper (2022–2024) and 2021 Country Portfolio Performance Review. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/eritrea-interim-country-strategy-paper-2022-2024-and-2021-country-portfolio-performance-review>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ World Bank. (2020). Macro Poverty Outlook for Eritrea. Available at: <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/439631571257015909/mpo-eri.pdf>

population earning income from subsistence crop farming and livestock rearing.²⁶ Mining, particularly copper, gold and zinc, constituted 60 percent of Eritrea's merchandise exports.²⁷ The national economy was largely dominated by state-owned enterprises and informal microenterprises.²⁸

Eritrea faced challenges in telecommunication infrastructure and online service delivery. The mobile subscription rate was low compared to global averages. According to International Telecommunication Union data, Eritrea's internet penetration rose from 0.6 percent in 2010 to approximately 26 percent by 2022. Although this marked important progress, it still left nearly three-quarters of the population unconnected. Thus, while uptake has accelerated, Eritrea continues to face one of the largest digital access gaps in the region.²⁹ Due to slow internet speeds, the use of ICT-based communication was limited and most activities remained paper-based.³⁰

Eritrea ranked 185 out of 187 countries in the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index, which evaluated a country's vulnerability and capacity to address climate change.³¹ The country is highly vulnerable to climate change, given its semi-arid to arid climate in the interior lowlands and hot desert-like climate along the coastal areas. Drought continued to damage key livelihood activities, including agriculture, livestock, water and natural resources, and biodiversity. These impacts often triggered food insecurity and placed a heavy strain on both the local and national economy.³² Additionally, Eritrea's topographical features, characterized by rugged escarpments and steep terrain, contributed to high water runoff, which exacerbated soil erosion and limited aquifer recharge.³³

1.5 UNDP in Eritrea and the country programme under review

UNDP has been operating in Eritrea since 1992.³⁴ During this time, it has collaborated with the Government of the State of Eritrea (GoSE) to promote and implement sustainable human development strategies and programmes aligned with national development priorities. The overall objectives of UNDP-supported programmes have been to strengthen the capacities of key national institutions to enhance development effectiveness and contribute to the achievement of UNDP strategic plans and international obligations, including the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³⁵

The UNDP Eritrea Country Programme (2022–2026) was designed to target priority areas jointly identified with the government and the priorities outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2022–2026). The theory of change underpinning the country programme was based on the expectation that, by the end of the cycle in 2026, the people of Eritrea would benefit from improved public service delivery (Outcome 1), a more inclusive society (Outcome 2) and enhanced resilience to the impacts of disasters and climate change (Outcome 3). These outcomes built directly on the priorities established in the 2017–2021 CPD, which also aimed to strengthen governance institutions, promote inclusive economic growth and enhance environmental sustainability. Across both CPD periods, UNDP aimed to support

²⁶ Ministry of Agriculture.

²⁷ African Development Bank. (2024). African Economic Outlook 2024. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2024/06/06/aeo_2024_-_country_notes.pdf

²⁸ African Development Bank Group. (2022). Eritrea Interim Country Strategy Paper (2022–2024) and 2021 Country Portfolio Performance Review.

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²⁹ International Telecommunication Union (ITU). (2023). Digital Development Dashboard: Eritrea. Geneva: ITU. Available at: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/DDD/ddd_ERI.pdf

³⁰ African Development Bank Group. (2022). Eritrea Interim Country Strategy Paper (2022–2024) and 2021 Country Portfolio Performance Review. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/eritrea-interim-country-strategy-paper-2022-2024-and-2021-country-portfolio-performance-review>

³¹ Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN). "Country Index — Eritrea." Available at: <https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/country/eritrea>

³² World Bank. (2023). Eritrea Country Profile. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/09904630426273085/pdf/IDU074886f8a01d02048580b6570bbd5bd73c4f9.pdf>

³³ International Centre for Research in Agroforestry and CIFOR-ICRAF. Soil and Water Conservation Manual for Eritrea. Available at: <https://www.cifor-icraf.org/publications/downloads/Publications/PDFS/B13230.pdf>

³⁴ UNDP Eritrea. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/eritrea/publications/undp-eritrea-glance>

³⁵ UNDP Eritrea. (2022). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021. Available at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/19048>

the government in improving citizens' well-being and fostering an inclusive, diversified, green and climate-resilient economy. The theory of change, indicating the causal pathway of change with assumptions on how UNDP intended to reach the outcomes through its interventions, is depicted in Annex 2.

Of the four outcomes in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2022–2026), the UNDP country programme prioritized three: one under Pillar I (Human Development and Well-being) and two under Pillar II (Inclusive, Diversified, Green and Climate-Resilient Economy).³⁶ Under Pillar I, UNDP collaborated with the GoSE to build the human and institutional capacities of key public sector institutions for effective and efficient public service delivery. Under Pillar II, UNDP provided technical and financial support to the GoSE in sustainable livelihoods and environmental sustainability. This included strengthening communities' productive capacity in agriculture, community-based rehabilitation and climate change adaptation measures. These efforts were complemented by a small grants programme focused on community-based integrated watershed management.

Planned resources for the previous CPD cycle (2017–2021) were set at \$143 million. While this target was somewhat ambitious, the CO mobilized approximately \$74 million in total resources (including \$23.8 million carried forward from the 2013–2016 CPD). However, implementation was affected by the slow absorptive capacity of national partners and by disruptions caused by the government's suspension of all UN programmes from May 2018 to July 2019 (15 months) and, for some projects involving national associations, until July 2020 (26 months³⁷). The COVID-19 lockdowns that began in early 2020 and continued through much of 2021 also caused significant disruptions. As a result, only \$28.6 million of the total resources mobilized was expended.

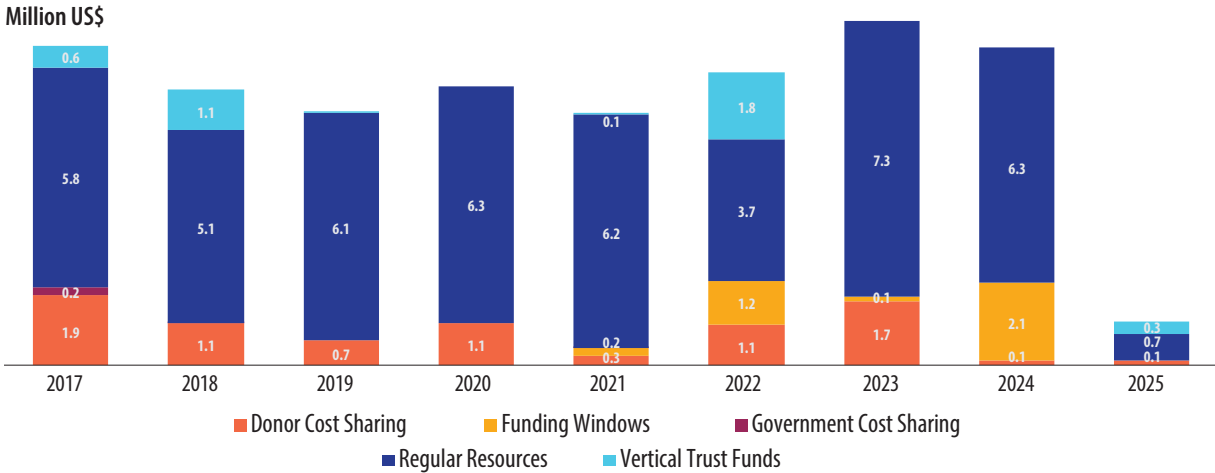
In the current CPD (2022–2026), the total planned or estimated budget was \$64.2 million. At the time of the evaluation, a total of \$54.1 million had been mobilized, representing approximately 84 percent of the CPD target.

As presented in Figure 2, the CO relied heavily on core resources across both the current and previous CPD cycles. Core resources constituted \$18 million (67.7 percent) of expenditure in the current cycle and \$29.5 million (80.9 percent) in the previous cycle. The funding sources reflected a more constrained donor landscape in the current CPD cycle compared to the previous cycle. Donor cost-sharing amounted to \$5 million (13.2 percent) in the previous cycle and declined to \$2.9 million (8.8 percent) in the current cycle. Vertical trust funds accounted for \$1.7 million (4.6 percent) of expenditure in the previous cycle and increased slightly to \$2.1 million (6.3 percent) in the current cycle. In contrast, the Funding Windows became more significant in the current CPD cycle, contributing \$3.4 million (10.3 percent) compared to \$0.2 million (0.7 percent) in the previous cycle. Thus, while overall resources were lower in the current cycle, funding in the current cycle was more diverse than in the previous cycle.

³⁶ These pillars remained the same under both the 2017–2021 and 2022–2026 CPDs, as the UN Cooperation Framework from which they were drawn was based on the same indicative National Development Plan (2014–2018), which continued to serve as the guiding document for national development priorities.

³⁷ According to unofficial communication, the GoSE suspended the UN programme, citing the need to undertake internal consultations and reorganization.

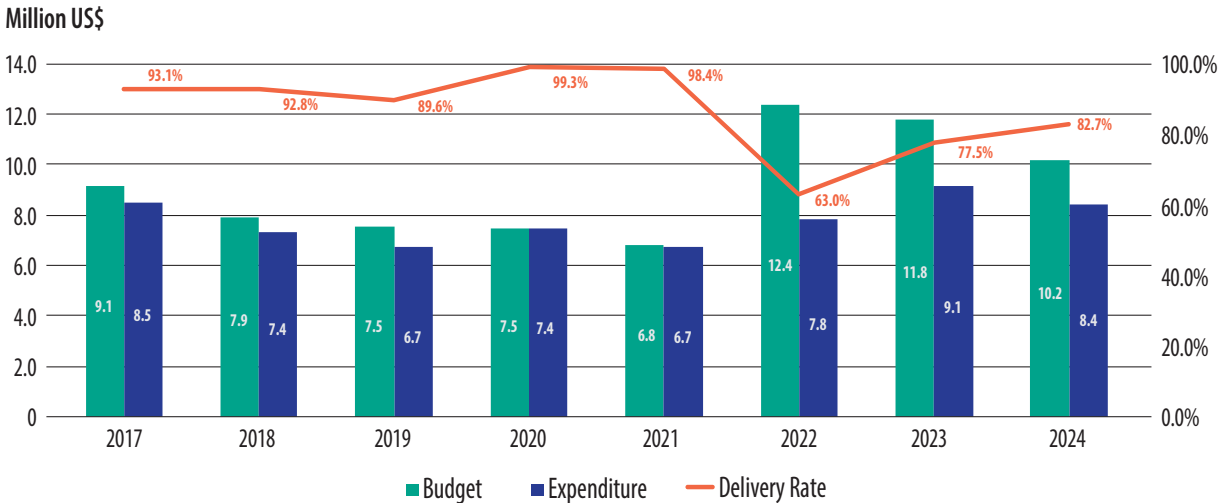
FIGURE 2: Annual Expenditure by Fund Category (2017–2025)



Source: UNDP Financial Systems (Atlas and Quantum), extracted 2 April 2025

During the 2017–2021 period, the highest annual expenditure was \$8.5 million in 2017 (see Figure 3). In the current CPD cycle, expenditure peaked at \$9.1 million in 2023. However, delivery rates were consistently higher in the previous cycle, averaging above 94 percent, compared with an average of 74 percent in the current cycle. This suggests that, despite higher budgets and expenditures in absolute terms, delivery performance fluctuated and remained comparatively lower in the current cycle owing to the slow absorptive capacity of implementing partners.

FIGURE 3: Annual Budget and Expenditure (2017–2024)

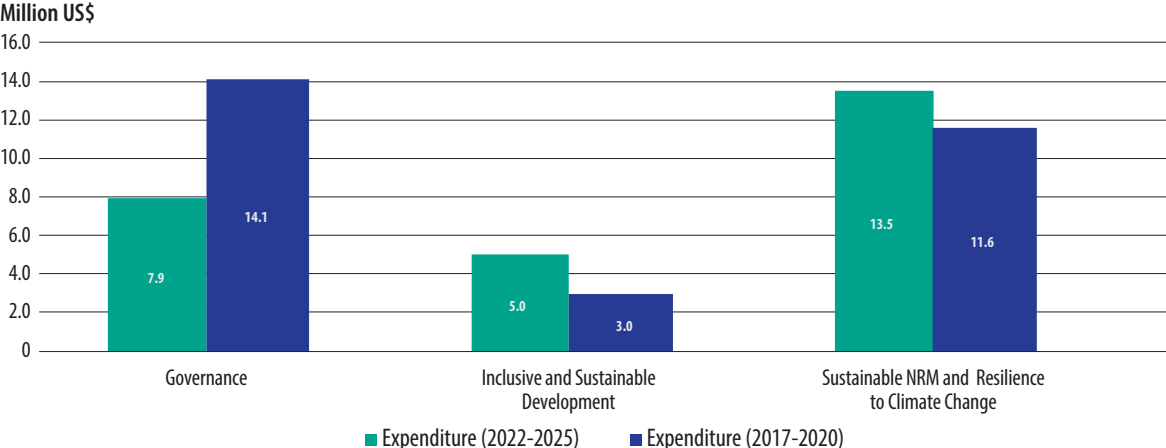


Source: UNDP Financial Systems (Atlas and Quantum), extracted 2 April 2025

Between 2022 and 2025, Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Climate Resilience accounted for 51 percent of total programme expenditure, up from 40 percent during 2017–2020, reflecting a shift in prioritization towards climate resilience and environmental sustainability. Governance, while remaining a significant area of investment, saw its share decrease from 49 percent in 2017–2020 to 30 percent in 2022–2025. Expenditure on inclusive growth increased from 10 percent to 19 percent over the same period, indicating a strengthened focus on livelihoods. When viewed across the full period of 2017–2025

(excluding 2021), the distribution of total programme expenditure stood at 45 percent for Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Climate Resilience, 40 percent for Governance and 15 percent for Inclusive Growth (see Figure 4).³⁸

FIGURE 4: Expenditure by Outcome Area: 2017–2020 vs. 2022–2025 (2021 data not included)



Source: UNDP Financial Systems (Atlas and Quantum), extracted 2 April 2025 (2022–2025); UNDP (2022), Eritrea CPD Terminal Evaluation (2017–2020 financial analysis)

All UNDP interventions in Eritrea were implemented through a government-led implementation approach, consistent with the GoSE’s preference for self-reliance and minimal external influence. The Ministry of Finance and National Development (MoFND) was mandated to lead and coordinate all development interventions, including those implemented directly by the government and those supported by development partners such as UNDP. MoFND led the identification and prioritization of national development needs across sectors.

³⁸ UNDP Financial Systems (Atlas and Quantum), extracted 2 April 2025; and UNDP. (2022). Terminal Evaluation of the Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

CHAPTER 2

FINDINGS



This chapter presents the outcome-level results of the evaluation, followed by an assessment of cross-cutting issues and key factors that have influenced UNDP's performance and contributions to results.

2.1 UNDP strategic and programmatic offer

Finding 1. Relevance and strategic positioning: UNDP's relevance and comparative advantage in Eritrea were driven by its long-standing engagement, physical presence, programmatic alignment with national priorities and its ability to mobilize core and external financial resources for development. These elements, together with government trust, contributed to UNDP's strategic position as an integrator. Despite administrative and operational challenges (including the abrupt discontinuation of interventions planned with traditional partners such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Office of the Auditor General (OAG), NCEW, NUEW and NUEYS), UNDP's presence and programming remained indispensable in a context where few other development partners had the resources to engage at scale.

UNDP was a major development partner in Eritrea when both Official Development Assistance (ODA) data and total United Nations Country Team (UNCT) budgets were benchmarked. For example, the United Nations managed 18 percent (\$126.5 million) of total ODA to Eritrea between 2016 and 2022, and within this, UNDP managed the largest share in the UN system at 32 percent (\$40.5 million). Under the current three-year UNCT workplan (2024–2026), UNDP was the lead partner, accounting for approximately 48 percent of the funds pledged by the UN system towards implementing the workplan, including available resources, pipeline allocations and expected resource mobilization.³⁹

The UNDP programme in Eritrea remained highly relevant to national priorities as defined in the National Indicative Development Plan 2014–2018, which continued to guide national planning during the programme period.⁴⁰ Through its physical presence, UNDP maintained consistent engagement and dialogue with government counterparts, responded swiftly to emerging needs and adapted its programming to the evolving political context. The long-term relationship, built over multiple programme cycles, positioned UNDP as a reliable partner. As a result, national partners frequently called upon UNDP to support their policy initiatives, capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance efforts. Examples included UNDP's work with the government on Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects and ongoing work on private-sector development. The government requested UNDP's support for the first comprehensive National Development Plan (NDP) 2026–2030 since independence, which reflected the deep trust placed in UNDP's technical expertise and its ability to align international development standards with Eritrea's context and priorities.

UNDP's comparative advantage was strongly rooted in its ability to act as a development integrator and as an entry point for broader development cooperation in Eritrea. For example, UNDP used this integrator role to facilitate \$19 million in energy-sector financing from the African Development Bank (AfDB) and \$4 million from the Government of Italy for sustainable smallholder irrigated agriculture in arid and semi-arid lands with the GoSE. UNDP also facilitated technical support from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for Eritrea Customs and from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization for the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI). This integrator role helped align international technical support with the GoSE's development priorities.

³⁹ United Nations Multi-Year Workplan in Eritrea (2024–2026).

⁴⁰ UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI). (2023). Audit of UNDP Country Office in Eritrea.

After the signing of the country programme document, the GoSE reprioritized its needs in 2022 to focus on areas of direct economic benefits. As part of this process, the list of implementing partners that the government provided to the UN excluded the MoJ, OAG, NCEW, NUEW and NUEYS. This affected the interventions that UNDP had planned with these partners. Nevertheless, UNDP demonstrated flexibility in responding to new priority areas identified by the government. UNDP also collaborated closely with other UN agencies to re-engage the government in addressing the suspension of programme implementation, reactivate selected GEF projects and facilitate a consultative meeting between national implementing partners and UN agencies, the first such meeting since UNDP began operations in the country.

UNDP's role in capacity development was considered foundational across institutions. These initiatives cut across all outcomes and involved nearly all major government institutions in Eritrea. UNDP was consistently recognized for providing much-needed training, equipment and institutional support. Its contributions to access to justice, the professionalization of auditing, the roll-out of the innovation hub and supporting entrepreneurship training for vulnerable groups—including women and people with disabilities—were highly valued. Many stakeholders described UNDP as a “listening partner”, highlighting its flexibility and pragmatism in responding to evolving government needs.

Finding 2. Coherence: UNDP-funded initiatives showed reduced duplication and stronger complementarity with government and development partner efforts, reflecting the national partners' leadership in programme planning and implementation. Similar complementarities were observed with other UN agencies, although these were constrained by coordination gaps.

As part of the government's MoFND-led coordination of development partners' work in Eritrea, the GoSE signed a single joint workplan with UN agencies. MoFND coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting processes between UN agencies (including UNDP) and government institutions, which served as implementing partners. All UNDP projects were delivered through a National Implementation Modality, which reinforced coherence. There was less duplication and greater complementarity between UNDP-funded initiatives and those of the government and other development partners as the national partners led programme planning and implementation.

The joint workplan between the UN and the government required UN agencies, including UNDP, to align their interventions. For example, UNDP, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), supported technical and infrastructural capacity building at the National Statistics Office (NSO). UNDP also partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to implement the Joint Date Palm Programme aimed at enhancing date-palm production in Eritrea.

UNDP's support to climate-resilient agricultural practices and solar-powered water infrastructure created synergies with initiatives of FAO, IFAD and UNICEF. Solar systems deployed for potable water in communities such as Habero and Nakfa intersected with broader WASH interventions supported by UNICEF and WHO. UNDP's work in youth employment and vocational skills similarly aligned with UNFPA and UNICEF efforts in the previous cycle and with current AfDB initiatives involving NCEW. UNDP's interventions in renewable energy and soil and water conservation also aligned with AfDB, one of Eritrea's primary development partners.

Although the joint workplan strengthened initial coherence, UN agencies continued to operate bilaterally with the government, even when joint projects existed. Government partners submitted separate annual and financial reports to different UN agencies for the same joint interventions. Recognition of this gap has grown, and inter-agency, area-based and inter-sectoral joint planning has been identified as a priority for 2025.

There was some evidence of internal integration across UNDP interventions. For example, energy-access projects implemented by the Ministry of Energy, including substation expansion and rural electrification, supported economic empowerment initiatives delivered by UNDP and NUEYS. Energy infrastructure improved the functionality of youth training centres and supported community-based enterprises. The Date Palm Support Programme, which involved solar-powered irrigation, seedling distribution and vocational training, also demonstrated internal coherence by linking livelihoods, renewable energy and agricultural value-chain development.

However, opportunities to strengthen coherence further were missed. For instance, although UNDP was aware of national grid renovation and expansion supported by the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), and although lessons from the EU-funded off-grid solar project indicated that strengthening and connecting to the national grid was preferable to isolated off-grid systems, some projects—including those of the NSO—still installed isolated mini solar systems that could have been reassigned for other needs. Similarly, the Small Grants Programme (SGP) could have been better integrated with UNDP projects and maintained stronger continuity in supporting community groups previously engaged through SGP interventions.

2.2 UNDP contributions to human development and well-being

Finding 3. Institutional strengthening: UNDP’s capacity development support was foundational in strengthening national institutions and enhancing systems for service delivery. It contributed to stronger government capacities by improving government staff skills. Systemic impact was, however, limited by the lack of integration into broader national capacity development strategies or a civil service reform agenda.

Capacity development was a cross-cutting theme of UNDP’s engagement in Eritrea and was one of the main objectives in both the current and previous CPDs as a means to strengthen public sector institutions for accountability and enhanced service delivery. UNDP pursued this through direct technical and material support, including the provision of ICT equipment, renovation of buildings, supply of software and advisory support. Training and knowledge exchange were provided to staff of key institutions such as the Customs Department, MoFA, MoFND, Mol, MoJ, MoTI, NCEW, NSO, NUEW, NUEYS and OAG. UNDP harnessed corporate tools, including the Global Policy Network mechanism and regional thematic hubs, to fill capacity gaps in national partners. In most cases, experts recruited by UNDP were stationed within individual ministries to support the implementation of specific interventions and usually stayed between one and two years to facilitate knowledge transfer. This contributed to enhanced technical skills, knowledge and performance in specific institutions.

At the OAG, UNDP financial support in the previous CPD cycle facilitated a series of training courses in financial and IT systems, performance and compliance auditing, and a South–South learning visit to the United Republic of Tanzania to learn about audit service practices, reaching 151 OAG staff.⁴¹ UNDP supported professional accountancy training in the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, which trained over 100 professionals in the country,⁴² increasing the number of certified professional accountants. This initiative was sustained and continued with support from the African Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions even after UNDP’s financial support ended.⁴³ UNDP funding also enabled the procurement of computers and accessories (including internet connectivity), roll-out of audit manuals, development of a gender policy and the establishment of a day-care centre to support women in the office. Together, these measures

⁴¹ UNDP Eritrea thematic fact sheets.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Key informant interview.

contributed to an improvement in the OAG's audit performance score from 1.8 in 2021 to 2.8 in 2024.⁴⁴ Over the same period, the number of institutions audited increased by nearly 200 percent (from 12 to 34), and the office shifted its work from internal auditing towards performance-based auditing.⁴⁵

UNDP has been a key partner to the MoJ in Eritrea since 1994/95, supporting institutional and human capacity development aligned with national priorities on legal reform and access to justice. The partnership focused on strengthening both the formal justice system and community-level mechanisms, including alternative dispute resolution and customary law. A significant contribution was the tripartite legal education programme between UNDP, the Ministry of Justice and the University of South Africa, initiated in the previous CPD cycle. This initiative enabled more than 130 justice sector workers to pursue Master of Laws (LLM) degrees.⁴⁶ This enhanced the knowledge of justice sector workers and increased the number of practitioners with LLMs beyond the initial baseline of three. The initiative has been linked to the Mekerka Training Centre, which trains village courts and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. UNDP also supported a solar mini-grid system, a study tour to Rwanda to examine its e-justice system and complementary hardware and software that enabled the introduction of a pilot e-justice system in 2023. Initial feedback from the pilot indicated shorter case durations and reduced backlogs.⁴⁷

Since 2016, UNDP has supported the MoI's gradual migration from analogue to digital information production. This support included providing technical equipment such as computers, servers and cameras; capacity-building for media personnel in journalism and media reporting; and IT training for technicians. The new digital system contributed to reducing the time required to develop television programmes from days to hours and improved the integration of data processing and storage systems, enabling access to stored data in seconds rather than hours. Anecdotal feedback from audience phone calls indicated that media reach and coverage expanded to previously underserved areas, including the Southern Red Sea region, reaching an estimated 90,000 additional people. The quality of television broadcasts also improved notably, with clearer and more vivid visuals attributed to digital tools and enhanced production processes.⁴⁸

These capacity-strengthening interventions within individual ministries were largely successful, despite the slow pace of implementation caused by challenges within the operational environment, including delays in annual workplan approvals, occasional halts in implementation and shifts in government priorities. The initiatives also demonstrated a degree of sustainability. For example, while the MoJ, NCEW and OAG were no longer part of the government workplan with the UN system and therefore did not benefit from UNDP's financial support, they were able to continue operations and interventions previously supported by UNDP, albeit at a slower pace and sometimes with assistance from other development partners.

However, most ministries required external support for infrastructure upgrades and specialized training, as domestic budgetary allocations and access to the resources needed to sustain and expand these initiatives remained constrained. For example, the NCEW continued to receive support from the AfDB, while the OAG also received support from the African Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions. Many training activities remained project-dependent, with limited integration into national capacity development strategies or a wider civil service reform agenda. This raised concerns about the systemic impact of individual interventions. Capacity development was also concentrated in urban centres, particularly Asmara, while local and regional institutions often remained underserved. In some cases, cross-institutional learning and knowledge-sharing were limited.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ UNDP. (2021). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

⁴⁶ Key informant interview.

⁴⁷ Key informant interview.

⁴⁸ UNDP. (2021). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

Finding 4. Planning and data: UNDP played a pivotal role in revitalizing national development planning and strengthening data-generation systems in Eritrea, positioning itself as a key enabler of evidence-based policymaking. Sustainability remained a concern due to funding gaps.

Both the 2017–2021 and 2022–2026 UNDP CPDs for Eritrea recognized the need to enable evidence-based development planning and data for effective monitoring of national priorities and the SDGs. Both CPDs focused on enhancing the technical capacity of the NSO and other data-producing institutions to generate, analyse and use disaggregated data for planning and decision-making. During the 2017–2021 CPD cycle, UNDP and the EU developed a joint project aimed at strengthening Eritrea’s national statistics and macroeconomic statistics systems, with a total budget of EUR 4,750,000. Expected outputs included the development of national accounts, the establishment of civil registration systems, strengthened statistical capacity and enhanced collaboration between the NSO and MoFND to support data-driven policy formulation.⁴⁹ However, the opportunity to implement this project was lost due to broader operational constraints, including delays in execution and COVID-19 lockdowns. Eventually, the funding secured from the EU was affected by sanctions imposed on Eritrea.⁵⁰

In the current CPD cycle, UNDP and other UN agencies continued work on strengthening Eritrea’s national statistics and macroeconomic statistics systems. The government has been more open to implementing this work in the current cycle. UNDP provided financial support and technical experts to the NSO to update its Statistical Master Plan (2023–2027), which had not been updated since 2014.⁵¹ Based on the Capacity Development Plan, UNDP provided the NSO with ICT equipment, including computers, laptops, servers, printers, network switches and a solar power supply, which has improved staff productivity.⁵² UNDP recruited technical advisors (for example, through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) and facilitated staff training in GIS, national accounts and economic statistics. This support enabled the NSO to compile GDP estimates using administrative and secondary data, a major breakthrough for a country that had not produced comprehensive economic statistics since 2010. UNDP also provided funding for the procurement of digital equipment and technical backstopping on survey design and implementation methodology, which has helped the NSO lay the groundwork for Demographic and Health Survey Round 4, expected in 2025.

In parallel with progress on generating national statistics, in early 2023 the GoSE initiated efforts to develop the first comprehensive national development plan since independence. UNDP led technical consultations and facilitated training for 50 senior government officials from 10 key ministries through a virtual workshop on policy formulation and planning, delivered by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy using Singapore’s experience. Through the Africa Development Economist Network, UNDP supported the development of sector policy papers and proposed thematic pillars as at the time of the evaluation. UNDP’s work in this process helped further strengthen trust with the GoSE, particularly the MoFND, which is coordinating the planning process. The national development plan was a prerequisite for development partners’ country strategy documents, which could unlock development financing.

UNDP provided financial support, convened stakeholder forums and contributed substantive inputs to the development of Eritrea’s Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in 2022 and 2024, as well as the Universal Periodic Review in 2024. Eritrea’s engagement in the VNR process was a significant milestone—the first of its kind for the country—and its participation twice in quick succession pointed to a growing commitment

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Key informant interview.

⁵¹ UNDP Eritrea Results-Oriented Annual Report 2023.

⁵² Key informant interview.

to global development norms. UNDP's facilitation role in these processes was instrumental in reinforcing the country's integration into international development dialogue and in fostering an institutional culture of reporting and accountability against the SDGs.

UNDP has helped re-establish national development planning processes and build foundational statistical capacity after years of limited investment in data systems. However, the sustainability of these initiatives remained a concern. Many of the gains in statistical capacity were still reliant on project-based funding and external expertise. For example, a substantial budget gap persisted for the NSO to fully implement the interventions outlined in its workplan, even when combining government allocations and support from development partners. Full institutionalization of these functions will require sustained national investment, further civil service capacity reforms and broader support from other development partners, which may be limited given the narrow donor base and the current global funding constraints.

Finding 5. Livelihoods improvement: UNDP's interventions delivered targeted skills development, entrepreneurship and rural livelihoods enhancement for vulnerable groups, particularly women and youth. The continuity and possible scaling up of these interventions remained constrained by funding gaps.

UNDP positioned itself as a key actor in expanding livelihood opportunities for vulnerable populations, including unemployed youth, women-headed households, persons with disabilities and informal workers in Eritrea. UNDP's support to rural livelihoods and job creation was implemented through the Date Palm Support Programme, the food-for-work scheme, the SGP and the youth employment and skills development programme. These interventions were delivered in coordination with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, MoA, NCEW, NUEW and NUEYS. The initiatives were aligned with the national Technical and Vocational Education and Training curriculum, enhancing their relevance and coherence.

Through the Youth Employment and Skills Development Programme (2014–2022), UNDP supported the renovation and equipping of four NUEYS youth training centres located in Adi Guadad (Zoba Maekel), Barentu (Zoba Gash Barka), Keren (Zoba Anseba) and Mendefera (Zoba Debub). These centres were outfitted with modern training equipment and solar installations, increasing their intake capacity and enabling evening classes. In collaboration with NCEW, NUEW and NUEYS, UNDP trained 3,512 youth (75 percent of whom were women) across all six regions of Eritrea in 35 skill areas tailored to local market needs, including computer literacy, beekeeping, tailoring, electronics and hairdressing. In addition, as of 2022, 276 beneficiaries (77 percent women) received start-up loans to establish small businesses. Loan-repayment rates exceeded 80 percent.⁵³ Tracking of project outcomes was limited; for example, the final evaluation could not determine how many beneficiaries secured employment.

Under the date-palm initiative implemented in collaboration with FAO, IFAD and the MoA, about 570 acres of farmland were cultivated by 350 farmers.⁵⁴ Each farmer typically employed two to three individuals, creating an estimated 700 jobs and contributing to rural labour-market revitalization.⁵⁵ UNDP installed a solar-powered system to strengthen the biotechnology laboratory at NARI and procured laboratory equipment and chemical reagents for tissue culture to produce healthy date-palm plantlets. In a complementary effort under the food-for-work programme, implemented by UNDP together with the Ministries of Agriculture and local government, immediate livelihood and food-security support was provided to 6,500 pastoral and agro-pastoral households, benefiting approximately 23,000 individuals in the most drought-affected areas.⁵⁶

⁵³ UNDP. (2023). Evaluation of the Youth Employment and Skills Development Programme (2014–2022).

⁵⁴ Ministry of Agriculture.

⁵⁵ Key informant interview.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Agriculture.

UNDP also collaborated with NCEW on livelihood-recovery efforts, reaching over 3,000 people affected by COVID-19-related job losses. Support included start-up assistance for informal workers, livestock distribution for women-headed households and the promotion of rural income-generating activities. These interventions directly targeted the most vulnerable, supporting their reintegration into the local economy.⁵⁷ UNDP further strengthened NCEW's capacity to promote decent work in the workplace and facilitate the transition of informal workers into the formal sector. More than 4,000 women benefited from leadership, financial-literacy and entrepreneurship training, including the preparation of simple business plans.⁵⁸ Notable success stories included a former office cleaner who became a professional driver, and another who transitioned to an office secretary, both through the decent-work promotion initiative.

UNDP also provided technical support to NUEYS in establishing Eritrea's National Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Hub. This hub has fostered competitions and local innovations among youth. Beneficiaries developed locally innovative tools and equipment, including a hand-and-foot pump that improved irrigation efficiency for smallholder farmers, a maize huller that increased the efficiency and quality of grain processing in local value chains, an injera-making machine that reduced the time required to prepare injera and assembled laptops for people who are blind.⁵⁹

Despite not meeting some project-specific targets, UNDP's support to livelihoods and job creation in Eritrea has been effective, given the country's limited employment opportunities, weak private-sector ecosystem and underdeveloped vocational-training infrastructure. The sustainability of these interventions was mixed. On the positive side, several components were expected to continue. The renovated training centres remain functional, continue to deliver training using standard programme-provided equipment and materials, and charge marginal fees to cover maintenance costs. The microcredit revolving fund also remains active, and some training centres continue to receive support from development partners such as the AfDB. The food-for-work scheme may also continue through national efforts, albeit on a limited scale.

However, there was limited clarity on long-term continuity and options for scaling up these interventions. The livelihood interventions were mostly funded through time-bound sources, such as bilateral funds (for example, for youth employment), the CERF (for food-for-work) and the Funding Window (for the date-palm initiative). While FAO and IFAD have committed limited funding to maintain aspects of the date-palm project, CERF funding will not continue beyond 2025 and bilateral financing has not been renewed since 2022. In the absence of a stable and diversified financing strategy, the continuity of these interventions beyond their current implementation cycles remained unclear.

Finding 6. Private sector development: UNDP's contribution to private-sector development in Eritrea included capacity development support to MoTI, the development of strategies for revitalizing existing enterprises and the provision of policy advice. While the current approach was more demand-driven by the government compared to the earlier supply-driven approach led by UNDP and donors, broader systemic constraints in the enabling environment continued to inhibit private-sector development.

UNDP's support to private-sector development was cautious but catalytic, focusing on areas where it could leverage its comparative advantage in institutional strengthening, enterprise development and advisory services. In the previous CPD cycle, UNDP's efforts to support the government in creating an enabling environment for doing business under the Youth Employment and Skills Development Programme (2014–2022) faced challenges owing to misalignment with national implementation preferences.

⁵⁷ UNDP. (2021). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

⁵⁸ Key informant interview.

⁵⁹ Injera is a locally prepared dish in Eritrea, traditionally made from fermented teff flour and used to scoop up stews and other dishes.

As the broader activities on the enabling environment were not realized, the programme focus shifted to training youth in skills areas that did not require business licences, such as solar installation, water pump maintenance, hairdressing and beekeeping.⁶⁰

UNDP's work on private-sector development under the current CPD cycle was demand-driven by the government, starting in 2023.⁶¹ As part of its multi-year AWP (2024–2026) with the UN agencies, the government, through MoTI, prioritized efforts to strengthen institutional and technical capacities to foster an enabling environment for enterprise growth. UNDP therefore supported capacity development initiatives aimed at improving MoTI's ability to design and implement enterprise development strategies and policies. UNDP also supported the ministry in preparing a comprehensive enterprise development strategy focused on revitalizing 20 dormant factories in the country.⁶² With UNDP's financial support, MoTI began a situational assessment of some of these enterprises to inform the development of bankable project proposals intended to attract investment for their revitalization. UNDP has provided financial support for MoFND to engage UNIDO to work with the government on funding approaches for the identified enterprises.

The strong alignment of UNDP's private-sector initiatives with national priorities through a government-led, demand-driven approach strengthened ownership and sustainability, making successful outcomes more likely. However, the approach adopted remained limited in scope, as it did not comprehensively address the structural and institutional challenges within the enabling environment for private-sector development. Key issues such as regulatory constraints, limited access to finance and the absence of a coherent enterprise-development policy framework continued to hinder private-sector growth. As such, while the current work was promising, its long-term effectiveness would depend on the extent to which these foundational barriers were systematically addressed.

2.3 UNDP contributions to an inclusive, diversified, green and climate-resilient economy

Finding 7. Climate resilience and natural resource management: UNDP's long-standing support for climate resilience and natural resource management in Eritrea contributed to ecosystem restoration and improved livelihoods. The initiatives enhanced environmental sustainability while promoting inclusion, particularly among women and rural populations. The documentation of results and the use of lessons to strengthen ongoing and future projects were not optimal.

In the current cycle, UNDP played a key role as a resource mobilizer for addressing vulnerabilities to climate change and for biodiversity, soil and water conservation. UNDP supported the GoSE in preparing proposals and technical documents to secure \$38.3 million dedicated to achieving environmental outcomes. This included a \$5.8 million project focused on establishing protected-area policies and institutional frameworks, as well as two reactivated GEF projects worth \$17.3 million. At the time of writing, UNDP was also supporting the government in developing two project concepts under GEF-8, with a projected value of \$19.8 million.

Across both the current and previous CPD cycles, UNDP supported sustainable natural resource management and ecosystem restoration. During the previous CPD cycle, UNDP collaborated with national partners to construct 1,023 kilometres of hillside and on-farm terraces and 101,018 cubic metres of check-dams.⁶³ The programme also supported the protection of 40 hectares of rangeland, the restoration of 45,824 hectares of native forest cover and the planting of 329,200 trees. In addition, more than 13,000 hectares of marine and

⁶⁰ UNDP. (2021). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

⁶¹ Evaluation of the Youth Employment and Skills Development Programme (2014–2022).

⁶² Key informant interview.

⁶³ UNDP. (2021). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

terrestrial habitats were placed under biodiversity protection and restoration. These interventions benefited over 106,000 rural farmers, half of whom were women, by promoting sustainable land and landscape management.⁶⁴ Similarly, through the SGP, UNDP's support to the National Union of Eritrean Women enabled community-led soil conservation initiatives. In Adi Gembelo, for example, 36 kilometres of terraces were constructed. At Merghida Farm, approximately 300 community members implemented land contouring, soil conservation and row cropping over 15 hectares.⁶⁵

UNDP interventions for sustainable natural resource management and ecosystem restoration were rooted in indigenous soil and water conservation techniques such as terraces, check-dam construction and spate irrigation. The initiatives aligned strongly with efforts by MoA and development partners such as IFAD and AfDB, enhancing sustainability. Sustainability was further supported by ongoing government initiatives that extended outreach to four drought-affected sub-zobas. For example, UNDP, through a food-for-work scheme, restored 1,100 hectares of fragile ecosystems and constructed eight livestock water ponds in drought-affected areas. The project built upon UNDP's cash-for-work approach from the previous CPD cycle and complemented existing government initiatives, expanding their reach to the sub-zobas of Habero and Hamelmalo in the Anseba Region.

Opportunities remained for the CO to document results, showcase achievements and build on lessons. Reporting of these results in UNDP internal documents was limited. Much of the data presented in this finding, especially from the current CPD cycle, were generated through estimation based on site visits and stakeholder engagement during this evaluation. For example, under SGP Operational Phase 5, UNDP provided technical and implementation support to the Taba Hamadae women's group in Ela Mokonen, Embardae village. This group planted 60 hectares of eucalyptus trees in a protected area and maintained them for two years until the project concluded in 2017.⁶⁶ In addition, approximately 240 kilometres of hillside terraces and 403 check-dams, with a total capacity of 1,800 m³, were constructed. Conservative estimates by the evaluation team suggest that 200 cubic metres of silt were prevented from entering the Mainefhi Dam, one of Asmara's primary water sources. Eight years later, the once-barren area had transformed into a regenerating forest. The return of native ground-cover species—facilitated by increased canopy cover, the removal of termite mounds and improved topsoil from reduced runoff—was a visible outcome. Beneficiaries reported enhanced food security, reduced vulnerability to drought and heightened awareness of sustainable land-use practices.

Finding 8. Renewable energy and power supply: UNDP made a strategic contribution to off-grid solar systems, grid-extension efforts and providing lessons to inform larger national projects. Short- to medium-term sustainability of these efforts was supported by the capacity of the Eritrean Electricity Corporation and continued engagement from development partners such as AfDB. However, long-term sustainability remained a concern due to constraints in domestic financial resources needed for ongoing maintenance.

In collaboration with the GoSE and the Eritrean Electricity Corporation, UNDP supported renewable energy access initiatives that were nationally managed. UNDP supported access to renewable energy through targeted interventions in off-grid rural electrification, grid extension and the integration of sustainable energy solutions in capacity-building initiatives across both the current and previous CPD periods. In the previous CPD cycle, UNDP, in partnership with the EU and the GoSE, implemented a 2.4 MW solar PV mini-grid system targeting 40,000 people (8,000 households) in Maidima, Areza and 28 surrounding villages, including 15 schools, two kindergartens, two hospitals, five health stations and more than 500 small

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Key informant interview.

⁶⁶ Progress report SGP project.

enterprises. Small solar systems were also provided to the four training institutions renovated at Adi Guadad, Mendefera, Keren and Barentu, and to OAG and MoJ. At the time of the field visit, all these solar systems were operational and managed by the respective institutions and the Eritrean Electricity Corporation.⁶⁷

UNDP's intervention from the previous cycle provided lessons that shaped its ongoing work in the current CPD cycle and informed support for larger initiatives. For example, through the UNDP–EU project it was learned that, instead of isolated power generation, what was needed was increased energy-generation capacity of the national grid and an extension of its reach through substations. UNDP used this lesson to develop a proposal for a 12 MW solar PV mini-grid for Barentu, Kerkebet and Tesseney for an AfDB open call in 2024, where \$19 million was committed from AfDB and \$5.5 million from UNDP.⁶⁸ At the time of writing, there were unresolved issues regarding UNDP's role in the projects, either as an AfDB implementing agency and co-financier or as a parallel co-financier and steering committee member only. Nevertheless, national partners commended UNDP's efforts in securing this funding. It was also noteworthy that, in a context where such resources were scarce, this proactive effort helped unlock additional support for national development.

In 2024, Eritrea renovated its power plants in Asmara and Massawa with support from the BADEA, increasing the country's energy-generation capacity to 155 MW. It was estimated that 54 MW was needed to power households, and the excess could be used for productive industries such as agriculture and manufacturing. However, Eritrea was constrained by limited substations (used for voltage transformation, distribution, protection, control and regulation) and a limited reach of transmission lines.

In response to this need, UNDP provided co-funding for the installation of the Adi Keih substation.⁶⁹ The substation was 90 percent complete at the time of the evaluation field mission. Prior to the project, the sub-zoba of Adi Keih relied on an isolated thermal diesel-powered generator for its energy supply. Stakeholders reported that this only provided energy to essential government facilities such as offices and hospitals and that even these services were rationed, had cut-off times and suffered irregular supply. The Adi Keih substation is composed of three transformers fed by energy from Asmara. The transformers will directly serve a population of 70,000 and create a better foundation for around 350,000 people living in the sub-zobas of Adi Keih, Mai Ayni, Senafe and Tserona.⁷⁰

While the unavailability of updated national electricity-related data limited exact measurement, UNDP's contributions were significant in light of the major challenges facing Eritrea's energy sector. The national grid remained limited, especially in rural areas where approximately 70 percent of the population resided, and of these, 90 percent lacked access to electricity.⁷¹ Per capita electricity consumption remained low at 75.136 kWh/year, below the African average of approximately 500 kWh/year.⁷² This context made UNDP's support in the energy sector, though modest in scale, particularly meaningful.⁷³ The evaluation observed that energy interventions supported by UNDP in the previous cycle continued to operate under the management of the Eritrean Electricity Corporation. The capacity of the Eritrean Electricity Corporation, along with ongoing support from development partners such as AfDB and the BADEA, provided a foundation for sustaining these interventions in the short to medium term. However, concerns remained regarding long-term sustainability due to limitations in domestic financial resources available for continued maintenance.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Key informant interview.

⁶⁹ The Adi-Keih substation has a total installed capacity of 12 MVA (2 units of 6 MVA each), operating at 66/15 kV. This means it can transform high-voltage electricity (66 kV) down to a lower voltage (15 kV) suitable for local distribution, supporting reliable power supply to thousands of end users.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Energy.

⁷¹ GoSE. (2024). Environmental and Social Impact Assessment and Management Plan Report for the Proposed Tesseney 6 MW Solar PV Mini-grid System.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 11th EDF National Indicative Programme 2014–2020 (October 2015).

2.4 Cross-cutting issues

Finding 9. Results-based management / M&E: Through UNDP's support to data systems and statistics, a foundation was laid for M&E at the macro level within the government-led implementation approach. However, knowledge management, results tracking and adaptive management were weakened by the underdeveloped M&E ecosystem in Eritrea, coupled with the CO's weak M&E system.

In Eritrea, the overall M&E ecosystem remained underdeveloped, constrained by limited data availability, weak institutional frameworks for tracking results and a fragmented approach to reporting and analysis. UNDP's support to data systems and statistical capacity at NSO and MoFND through technical assistance, infrastructure provision (for example, solar systems, computers, tablets, internet and GIS systems) and training helped to lay a foundation for national data systems and M&E.

As the programme was implemented through the government-led approach, UNDP's ability to monitor and evaluate its own portfolio performance, particularly at the outcome level, was constrained by weaknesses within the national M&E system. For example, monitoring was affected by the lack of internet and underdeveloped digital systems, as the country remained largely paper-based. This led to delays or, in many cases, limited data collection, analysis and reporting. Data sharing across institutions was rare. In rural and decentralized areas, monitoring was even more difficult due to the lack of transport and trained staff. There were no dedicated M&E units within key ministries, and formal reporting on results was inconsistent and often focused on activities rather than outcomes.

Under the government-led implementation approach, UNDP resources provided to national partners were used solely for direct implementation, with no financial provision for M&E. This promoted judicious resource use but limited national partners' ability to monitor programme implementation effectively, document and share results or support learning and adaptive management. For example, in the date-palm production value chain, UNDP did not report on indirect results such as contributions to household cash income and food security, labour outcomes or environmental effects.

The absence of data on labour and environmental dimensions not only underreported UNDP's achievements, but also prevented UNDP from forecasting social and environmental risks (for example, potential child labour, fair wages and groundwater extraction) and from applying UNDP's normative tools for mitigation (such as social and environmental assessments and safeguards). Several success stories from the SGP were also not reflected in UNDP reports, reducing opportunities for synergies.

In addition to weaknesses in the national M&E ecosystem, internal factors within the country office further weakened M&E. Many indicators in the UNDP CPD lacked defined baselines or targets. This gap was due partly to national data limitations but also to weaknesses in results-based management within the country office. For example, there was no M&E specialist to provide capacity support to national partners. The country office had no M&E plan or defined M&E activities. While UNDP's support to national partners was clear at the project conceptualization and design stage, there was limited evidence of comparable engagement during implementation. Technical backstopping and oversight during implementation were unclear and, in some cases, lacking, particularly at the community level. Stakeholder engagement revealed limited UNDP field presence and monitoring activities.

CO M&E activities were conducted mainly through financial management and risk oversight. Micro-assessments conducted for implementing partners confirmed their adherence to required financial management standards, and audits conducted by UNDP's Office of Audit and Investigations were rated

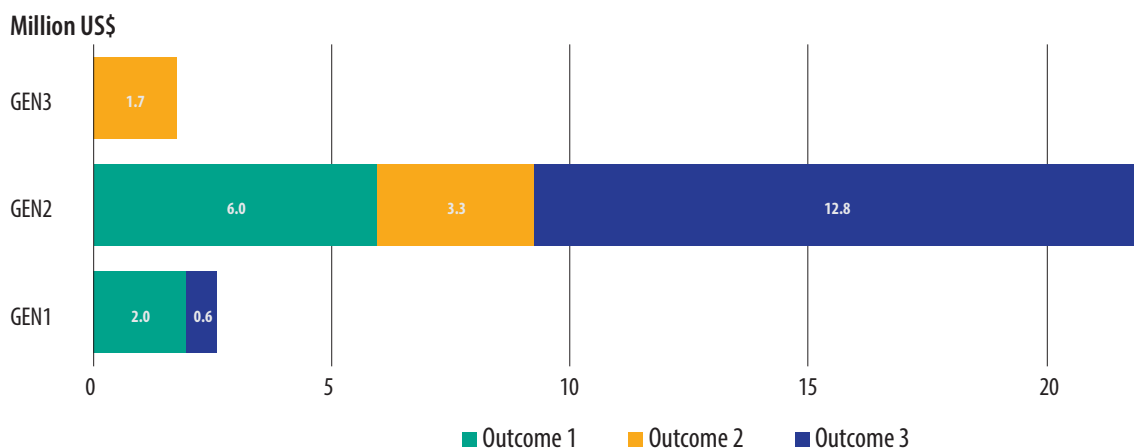
fully satisfactory. All UNDP-provided resources were used for their intended purposes, and unspent funds were fully returned to UNDP, as evidenced by financial reports and clean audits conducted by the Office of Audit and Investigations.

Finding 10. Gender and LNOB: UNDP Eritrea made notable and context-sensitive contributions to gender equality and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda. Its approach was characterized by institutional engagement, strategic partnerships and community-focused interventions that prioritized women, youth and vulnerable rural households. However, systematic integration of people with disabilities was lacking.

The UNDP Gender Marker showed that 83.3 percent (20 projects) of programme outputs were rated GEN2 (contributing to gender equality), while only 12.5 percent (three projects) reached GEN3 (transformative results) (see Figure 5). The CO received a Bronze Seal in the Gender Equality Seal certification process for its gender-mainstreaming work during 2022–2023.

The predominance of GEN2 ratings was consistent with evidence on the ground, as most UNDP interventions—including those related to food security, the SGP, the Adi Keih energy project, date-palm cultivation and capacity development—actively targeted women, addressed gender-specific vulnerabilities and provided direct benefits to women-headed households and women in rural areas. GEN3 ratings were largely aspirational and were not strongly reflected in implementation. Gender-transformative efforts remained limited in scale and depth, and systemic constraints, such as the lack of dedicated gender programming and the absence of gender-disaggregated data, particularly under Outcome 3, further hindered progress toward gender-transformative impacts.

FIGURE 5: Expenditure by Gender Marker and Outcomes (2022–2025)



Source: UNDP Financial Systems (Atlas and Quantum), extracted 2 April 2025

Women were prioritized across several initiatives in natural resource management, climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration. For example, through the SGP led by NUEW, UNDP played a strategic role in promoting inclusion, particularly for women. Designed with a strong emphasis on gender responsiveness, the programme ensured that women were not only beneficiaries but also active participants in project planning and implementation. Its inclusive design improved women’s access to local decision-making platforms and created new economic opportunities through environmentally friendly income-generating activities.

Similarly, the food-for-work programme advanced gender equality by specifically targeting and empowering women, particularly those from vulnerable and marginalized groups. Women-headed households made up the majority of the food-for-work workforce. The programme also adopted a model whereby older persons and people with disabilities who could not physically participate in labour-intensive work could be replaced by relatives or community members, while the benefits remained with the older person. This flexibility ensured inclusion without penalizing those with mobility constraints. Through these approaches, UNDP contributed not only to food security and climate resilience but also to the economic and social empowerment of vulnerable groups.

UNDP's skills-training and capacity-development initiatives across national institutions also incorporated gender considerations in beneficiary selection. The skills-training programmes reached up to 75 percent women. In some instances, women who had not yet reached management levels were given opportunities to participate in trainings organized for managerial staff (for example, in the OAG). In the justice sector, the LLM training programme comprised 40 percent women and included two people with disabilities. UNDP supported the development and implementation of a gender policy in the OAG, which now has a Gender Policy (2022–2024) that includes gender-responsive measures such as the provision of day-care facilities and flexible work arrangements for mothers.

On human rights, UNDP played a facilitative and technical-supporting role in Eritrea's 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. In collaboration with FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF and other UN agencies, UNDP financed stakeholder workshops and contributed to the review of the draft UPR report. While this engagement did not involve direct advocacy, it helped the GoSE fulfil its international human rights reporting obligations and created opportunities for dialogue on justice, legal reform and inclusive governance.

Unlike gender, which was considered throughout programme design, implementation, monitoring and reporting, disability inclusion was less consistently integrated. While disability considerations appeared in the CPD and occasionally in project design and beneficiary selection, integration remained sporadic and under-documented, with the notable exception of the SGP. For example, in the SGP-supported Merghida Farm initiative, UNDP supported an association of 14 war veterans with disabilities (a group organized through the Eritrean National War Disabled Veterans Association). UNDP provided two biodigesters for their 16-hectare farm, along with portable biogas backpacks (under 2 kg when filled) for household cooking. The biogas also powered heating for government-supplied chickens. With access to free energy, the veterans could boil water more frequently, improving sanitation for their dairy cows and contributing to better animal health outcomes. Stakeholders noted that the most valuable benefit of the project was the bio-slurry used as organic fertilizer, which now provides the farm with an unlimited supply of organic fertilizer, improving agricultural productivity and sustainability.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



This chapter presents the conclusions of the evaluation on UNDP's performance and its contributions to development results in Eritrea, followed by the recommendations and the management response.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. UNDP remained a critical and trusted partner in Eritrea's development landscape. This trust was anchored in UNDP's responsiveness and flexibility to the national context, alongside its physical presence, partnerships, global network and financial support to the government. Strong government ownership and coordination by MoFND created a high level of interconnection between UNDP initiatives and those of UN agencies and other development partners in Eritrea. Opportunities remained for UNDP to build on its existing level of joint programming with other UN agencies and to strengthen the internal coherence of its interventions.

UNDP continued to be a major development partner in Eritrea across both the current and previous CPD cycles, retaining its comparative advantage by supporting sectors where donor presence was limited, including institutional strengthening, energy access, food security and environmental sustainability. UNDP's ability to work in key sectors such as national planning, national statistics, justice and audit reform demonstrated the level of government trust it enjoyed in Eritrea. UNDP's strategic positioning in the country was underpinned by flexibility and responsiveness to national development priorities, its physical presence, longstanding partnerships, global network and financial support to the government.

UNDP provided last-mile and gap funding to support ongoing work by the government and other development partners, which strengthened its strategic position. In the environment portfolio, UNDP served as a development convener by supporting the GoSE in mobilizing resources for interventions in energy, environmental conservation and climate change adaptation, while contributing to livelihoods for women and rural communities. UNDP's role as a "development convener" also enabled it to support the UPR and Voluntary National Reviews (2022 and 2024), thereby strengthening Eritrea's engagement in international forums.

UNDP's programming across both CPD cycles reflected strong coherence with the government, other UN agencies and development partners. This alignment was facilitated by the government's ownership of national priorities and its coordination of development work in the country through MoFND. The government-led implementation approach reinforced alignment by placing the government at the centre of implementation, planning, monitoring and reporting. The government also maintained a joint workplan with all UN agencies, which supported joint programming efforts. Through this leadership and coordination, many UNDP interventions aligned with those of other UN agencies.

While gains in programming coherence with other UN agencies were commendable, gaps remained during implementation. UNDP's partnerships with other agencies did not extend beyond the initial joint workplan, as each agency dealt separately with implementing partners. This limited potential efficiency gains and the effectiveness that could have been achieved through collective UN agency efforts.

Conclusion 2. UNDP's initiatives in Eritrea yielded results across multiple sectors, despite operating in a resource-constrained environment. These achievements reflected UNDP's ability to translate limited resources into catalytic interventions with potential for long-term impact and sustainability. Results were most visible in institutional capacity strengthening, livelihoods, biodiversity conservation and energy access. However, limitations in data systems and results tracking constrained the ability to systematically assess outcome-level achievements and broader impact.

In both the current (2022–2026) and previous (2017–2021) CPD cycles, UNDP Eritrea delivered results across several sectors. While outcome-level progress was difficult to assess due to weak national data systems and the absence of baseline data, output-level results were visible. These outputs were achieved despite systemic challenges, including a highly centralized governance context, slow national absorptive capacity, low levels of donor financing and administrative delays, particularly in workplan approval and procurement processes. Many observed changes, such as land restoration and biodiversity conservation, institutional capacity gains and improved access to services, were likely to contribute to higher-level development outcomes. However, the absence of systematic outcome monitoring made it difficult to quantify the depth of these results.

Under governance and institutional strengthening (Outcome 1), UNDP aimed to enhance the accountability and efficiency of public sector institutions and thereby contribute to citizens' enjoyment of their right to development. Some progress toward this objective was evident at the activity level. For example, in the justice sector, UNDP's financial and technical assistance strengthened the capacity of justice sector personnel and supported the ongoing piloting of an e-justice system, which contributed to reduced case backlogs and efficiency gains in court service delivery. UNDP's support to OAG resulted in improvements in audit performance scores and notable capacity gains. Digitalization efforts with MoI improved access to media services and strengthened public communication systems.

UNDP implemented a range of interventions that combined immediate support with long-term resilience-building. UNDP provided food assistance to drought-affected vulnerable households in the Anseba, Northern Red Sea and Southern Red Sea regions through food-for-work schemes, while beneficiaries worked on soil and water conservation structures such as terraces and check-dams. In addition, skills development and entrepreneurship training were provided to vulnerable youth across all five regions of Eritrea and, in some cases, access to microcredit. Women-headed households in rural areas also received livelihood support in response to job losses related to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁴

The combined effect of these interventions was likely to contribute significantly to targeted results under CPD Outcome 2, which aimed to improve livelihoods, particularly for disadvantaged populations.

In the area of climate resilience, sustainable environment and natural resource management (CPD Outcome 3), UNDP's support contributed to visible improvements in forest cover, increased aquifer recharge and soil and water conservation through check-dam construction, tree planting and terracing. These initiatives were community driven and incentive based, aligning with traditional conservation practices. UNDP's initiatives in the energy and infrastructure sectors also led to gains in energy access and reliability.

Conclusion 3. UNDP initiatives with the GoSE showed signs of continuity. This was largely due to strong government ownership and the engagement of established social structures that supported grassroots participation and local accountability. Community-led initiatives, volunteerism and embedded local governance mechanisms further reinforced sustainability. However, limited national funding, reliance on project-based external support and underdeveloped operation and maintenance systems in the broader national context posed risks to long-term sustainability.

Sustainability of UNDP initiatives with the Government of Eritrea was mixed. Strong government ownership in the planning and implementation of development interventions, through the leadership of MoFND, facilitated continuity. UNDP's long-term partnerships with national counterparts under a fully

⁷⁴ UNDP. (2021). Terminal Evaluation of UNDP Eritrea CPD 2017–2021.

government-led implementation approach contributed to some skills accumulation which, together with national volunteerism and community-led initiatives embedded within local governance mechanisms, helped sustain many initiatives implemented across the current and previous programming cycles.

There was evidence of sustainability across several UNDP-supported interventions, including youth training and livelihoods, the functioning of microcredit revolving funds operating since 2016 and the continued operation of solar energy systems managed by the Eritrean Electricity Authority. UNDP's interventions in climate resilience and sustainable natural resource management contributed to long-term sustainability by integrating environmental restoration with community empowerment and institutional capacity development.

Through large-scale ecosystem restoration, soil and water conservation and renewable energy projects, UNDP helped strengthen rural communities' resilience to climate shocks. These initiatives created durable physical assets that continued to benefit communities by improving water access and agricultural productivity. In some interventions, such as the Date Palm Support Programme, arrangements with farmers to return plantlets and expand local production demonstrated sustainable replication models.

However, limited donor space and the ongoing global funding crunch, combined with the country's constrained fiscal context, posed significant risks to financial sustainability, continuity and the possible scaling up of livelihood interventions. These interventions were financed by time-bound funding sources such as CERF, funding windows and bilateral funds, none of which would be available going forward. While many UNDP initiatives demonstrated strong potential, their continuation and scaling were challenged by limited integration into national budgetary frameworks.

As a result, several interventions remained dependent on donor or project-based funding, with transition strategies into government systems yet to be clearly defined. For example, although MoJ, NCEW and OAG absorbed capacity and systems and were no longer part of the government workplan with the UN system, they continued to rely on external resources from other partners for infrastructure upgrades, technical assistance and specialized training. Renewed efforts by the government and UNDP to revitalize dormant factories to consolidate livelihood and economic development efforts faced systemic barriers such as limited business development services and a weak enabling environment for businesses.

Conclusion 4. UNDP's technical and financial support to national statistics and evidence-based planning contributed to the revitalization of data systems, national planning and global reporting, despite earlier disruptions and ongoing infrastructural and capacity challenges. However, persistent data gaps and weaknesses in UNDP's internal monitoring hindered effective results tracking, adaptive management and full visibility of UNDP's contributions.

UNDP's support to national statistics and evidence-based planning evolved across both CPD cycles (2017–2021 and 2022–2026), with a consistent focus on strengthening data systems for SDG monitoring and national development planning. While initial efforts in the previous cycle under a joint UNDP–EU project were disrupted due to operational constraints and geopolitical issues, the current cycle witnessed enhanced government engagement and tangible progress. UNDP's technical and financial assistance enabled NSO to update its Statistical Master Plan, enhance ICT infrastructure and resume GDP estimation and survey preparation after years of stagnation. UNDP also provided capacity training and technical advice to the GoSE to initiate Eritrea's first national development plan since independence and to support the country's engagement with global reporting frameworks, including SDG voluntary reporting and the UPR.

Despite these efforts, microdata for planning and decision-making remained a challenge in Eritrea. Systemic issues—such as lack of internet, underdeveloped digital systems, limited data collection, analysis and reporting capacity among national partners, limited data sharing and lack of transport—continued to hinder effective monitoring of national priorities and UNDP-supported initiatives. Internal shortcomings within the CO, including the lack of baselines and targets, the absence of a dedicated M&E specialist and the absence of a comprehensive M&E plan, further weakened results-based management.

While financial accountability and risk management were strong, as evidenced by clean audits and adherence to financial standards, there were weaknesses in results tracking and reporting. Reporting tended to focus on activities rather than results. Consequently, indirect results and several success stories were underreported or missed, affecting adaptive management and full visibility of UNDP contributions. While UNDP was effective at project conceptualization and design, there was limited evidence of comparable engagement during implementation. Technical backstopping during implementation was unclear and, in some cases, lacking, particularly at the community level.

Conclusion 5. UNDP mainstreamed gender across its programmes in Eritrea, but transformative gender outcomes and consistent inclusion of persons with disabilities remained limited.

UNDP made significant contributions to advancing gender equality in Eritrea, with more than 83 percent of projects rated gender responsive (GEN2) and recognition through a Bronze Seal in the Gender Equality Seal certification (2022–2023). Gender considerations were integrated into programme design and implementation, particularly in food security, climate resilience, energy access, capacity development and institutional reforms, benefiting women-headed households and rural women and enhancing their participation in decision-making and access to economic opportunities.

However, gender-transformative results (GEN3) remained limited due to systemic constraints, including the lack of dedicated gender programming and gender-disaggregated data. In contrast, disability inclusion was less consistent and largely under-documented, despite successful examples such as the biodigester initiative for war-disabled veterans, underscoring the need for a more systematic approach to inclusion across all vulnerable groups.

3.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to support UNDP’s contribution to Eritrea’s development priorities. They cover the key elements of UNDP performance under the current programme cycle where improvements could enhance the organization’s future support and reflect external contextual changes that should be considered in the design of the next country programme.

Recommendation 1. UNDP should strategically prioritize high-impact areas aligned with national priorities such as data systems, strengthening the energy grid through renewable energy, extending the energy grid, soil and water conservation and climate action. These are areas that have multiplier effects on poverty reduction by increasing opportunities for both production and employment creation. In addition, UNDP should invest in systems approaches to accelerate SDG progress amid resource constraints.

Given Eritrea’s limited donor base and the tightening of global funding streams, UNDP will need to be more strategic in prioritizing areas where it can deliver high-impact support. While resource availability will influence future engagement, UNDP should leverage its core and TRAC resources to invest in systems and portfolio approaches that offer multiplier effects and accelerate progress on lagging SDGs. In alignment with the government’s evolving development priorities, UNDP has established itself as a lead partner in foresight and visioning processes for the upcoming national development plan. This role provides an important

entry point for supporting long-term development pathways. Areas of engagement identified as especially critical by national and development partners include continued support to data and statistics through NSO, formulation and monitoring of the national development plan, extending the energy grid, soil and water conservation, livelihoods and climate change mitigation and adaptation. UNDP must position itself strategically within these sectors, leveraging its comparative advantage, technical expertise and global reach. Ongoing advocacy, policy dialogue and collaboration with government partners, stakeholders and UNDP's regional and global bureaux will be essential for addressing operational challenges that hinder effective project implementation and delivery in the Eritrean context.

Recommendation 2. UNDP should diversify and strengthen development financing by leveraging vertical funds such as the GEF and the Green Climate Fund, and non-traditional sources including philanthropic foundations and international financial institutions, while supporting national resource mobilization capacity.

Eritrea's constrained donor landscape and global development funding reductions pose significant challenges for sustainable development financing. Resource mobilization will remain a central pillar of development operations in the country, as identified as a priority by national stakeholders. UNDP holds a unique position as a lead agency supporting the government in mobilizing resources, particularly in the Nature, Climate and Energy sectors. To build on this role, UNDP should proactively explore opportunities to leverage funding from vertical funds such as GEF and the Green Climate Fund, as well as from non-traditional sources including philanthropic foundations and international financial institutions. UNDP should regularly engage the government to jointly identify and pursue these non-traditional financing sources. UNDP should also provide targeted capacity development to strengthen national resource mobilization efforts. Lessons from successful resource mobilization through GEF, the Government of Italy and AfDB should inform future efforts.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should strengthen national M&E systems and internal capacities to improve results tracking, evidence and data-driven decision-making, including strengthening the capacities of the MoFND and implementing partners, and the development of a national M&E framework that is aligned with the forthcoming NDP and linked to Agenda 2030 indicators.

UNDP's collaboration with MoFND and NSO has established a promising foundation for strengthening Eritrea's national M&E system. Nonetheless, challenges persist regarding the availability and quality of micro-level data needed for evidence-based decision-making and to track development outcomes. UNDP should continue working with development partners and other UN agencies to support the government in addressing these data gaps by pursuing the ongoing Demographic and Health Survey and the planned Household Income and Expenditure Survey, Living Standards Measurement Survey and work on the national accounts system. UNDP should strengthen the M&E capacities of MoFND and implementing partners to improve programme planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. UNDP should support the development of a national M&E framework aligned with the forthcoming NDP and linked to Agenda 2030 indicators.

Internally, the CO's M&E capacity should be reinforced through the preparation and operationalization of a programme-level M&E plan aligned with national systems. UNDP should also invest in continuous capacity-building initiatives for both its staff and national partners. Joint field monitoring missions with implementing partners can foster improved results tracking and strengthen adaptive management. Moreover, the 2024 pilot of an annual review and programming meeting involving UNDP and implementing partners should be institutionalized as a key mechanism for interaction, synergy-building and learning.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should enhance its support for institutional capacity development in Eritrea by advocating for a shift from fragmented, project-based approaches to a more coherent and long-term strategy aligned with the forthcoming NDP.

Capacity development remains a national priority in Eritrea, particularly given the government's emphasis on self-sufficiency and limited external influence. While UNDP has contributed to important capacity development outcomes across the current and previous CPD cycles, these efforts have largely been implemented through isolated, project-level interventions. To foster more sustainable and systemic change, UNDP should work with the government to design and implement a comprehensive national capacity development strategy. This strategy should be grounded in the priorities of the forthcoming NDP and provide a clear framework for action. It should identify institutional capacity gaps, establish long-term goals for civil service reform and create a roadmap for sustained investment in public sector competencies and institutional performance.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should deepen its commitment to gender equality and LNOB by supporting inclusive institutional policies, scaling successful models and mainstreaming gender across all programmes.

To sustain and deepen these achievements, UNDP should further institutionalize gender-sensitive approaches and disability inclusion across its operational frameworks and programmatic activities. This should include scaling up successful pilots such as the gender policy of the Office of the Auditor General and expanding initiatives such as the work with NUEW under the SGP to leverage women's participation in planning and implementation. Establishing gender focal points in key ministries will also be important.

Across all interventions, gender analysis, sex-disaggregated data and gender-specific indicators must be systematically integrated to ensure accountability and impact. UNDP should work with the government and implementing partners to develop and apply inclusive beneficiary selection criteria across all programmes. These criteria should be explicitly aligned with the LNOB principle, ensuring the proactive inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

3.3 Key recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.

UNDP should strategically prioritize high-impact areas aligned with national priorities such as data systems, strengthening the energy grid through renewable energy, extending the energy grid, soil and water conservation, and climate action. These are areas that have multiplier effects on poverty reduction through increasing opportunities for both production and employment creation. In addition, UNDP should invest in systems approaches to accelerate SDG progress amid resource constraints.

Management response: **Accepted**

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Establish a joint UNDP–Government task force on high-impact areas	Nov 2026 – ongoing	Programme Heads, Government focal ministries (MoFND, MoEM, MoA, MoE, MLWE, MoJ, NUEW, NUEYS, RR/DRR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ToR developed Number of meetings held annually 	
1.2 Develop an integrated framework to assess and rank interventions based on their multiplier effects on poverty reduction, employment and SDG impacts	Jun 2026 – Nov 2026	Programme teams, RR/DRR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framework finalized Percentage of interventions assessed/ranked using the framework 	
1.3 Support the government in building interoperable real-time data systems to track development indicators, target services and enhance accountability	Dec 2026 – Dec 2027	Programme teams, MoFND, NSO, line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interoperability framework and system architecture designed by Oct 2026 At least two ministries piloting real-time data systems by mid-2027 	
1.4 Design and support community-based renewable energy projects	Jan 2026 – Dec 2027	Programme teams, MoFND, MLWE, MoEM, other potential partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of feasibility studies completed Number of jobs created for women and youth in renewable energy projects Percentage of households/communities gaining improved access to energy 	

◀ Recommendation 1 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.5 Promote nature-based solutions and climate-smart agriculture, particularly in drought-prone and degraded areas	Mar 2026 – Dec 2028	Programme teams, MoA, MLWE, other partners (FAO, IFAD, GEF, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of hectares restored or rehabilitated using climate-smart/nature-based approaches • Number of households adopting climate-smart agricultural practices • Reduction in reported climate-related livelihood losses in target areas (baseline vs endline survey) • Case studies documented and shared for national scaling 	
1.6 Facilitate blended-finance and multi-stakeholder platforms to attract co-investment in infrastructure and climate resilience, and develop a resource mobilization strategy and workplan	Apr 2026 – Dec 2027	Programme teams, MoFND, MoEM, MoA, MLWE, other partners (AfDB, GEF, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource mobilization strategy completed • At least one multi-stakeholder platform established with a clear governance structure • Number or percentage of financing commitments mobilized through the blended finance approach 	

RECOMMENDATION 2.

UNDP should diversify and strengthen development financing by leveraging vertical funds such as the GEF and the Green Climate Fund, and non-traditional sources including philanthropic foundations and international financial institutions, while supporting national resource mobilization capacity.

Management response: **Accepted**

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 National resource mobilization capacity building	Jan – Dec 2026	Programme Heads, MoFND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training workshops delivered to different ministries • Number of ministries developing a financing strategy 	
2.2 Support the government in designing an integrated national financing framework to map and coordinate all resources for development financing	Jan 2026 – Dec 2031	Programme teams, MoFND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework completed and endorsed by MoFND • Number of funding streams mapped • Annual coordination review held 	
2.3 Build institutional and technical capacity to assess and manage climate- and environment-related vertical funds	Jan 2026 – Dec 2031	Programme teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of funding proposals submitted • Amount mobilized from vertical funds 	
2.4 Facilitate mechanisms to channel diaspora remittances, savings and expertise into productive sectors, and support the government in drafting a strategy for diaspora engagement in resource mobilization (including the formalization of remittances to reduce leakages).	Apr 2026 – Dec 2027	Programme teams, MoFND, MoFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diaspora engagement strategy finalized • Percentage increase in formalized remittances 	

◀ Recommendation 2 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.5 Intensify and strengthen reforms of the national customs system to enhance revenue collection and promote national development goals	Jul 2024 – Dec 2028	Programme teams, MoFND, MoTI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reform roadmap prepared Percentage increase in customs revenue collection efficiency Number of customs staff trained 	
2.6 Continue engaging with non-traditional partners to mobilize additional resources for development	Oct 2025 – ongoing	Programme teams, DRR/RR, MoFND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of partnership dialogues held annually Number of agreements signed with non-traditional partners Value of additional resources mobilized 	

RECOMMENDATION 3.



UNDP should strengthen national M&E systems and internal capacities to improve results tracking, evidence and data-driven decision-making, including strengthening the capacities of the MoFND and implementing partners, and the development of a national M&E framework that is aligned with the forthcoming NDP and linked to Agenda 2030 indicators.

Management response: Accepted



Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Capacity building for MoFND and implementing partners on M&E systems and results-based management	Jan 2022 – Dec 2031	Programme Heads, MoFND, NSO (and other IPs), regional bureaux	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training workshops delivered to different ministries Number of staff trained Number of ministries developing improved monitoring reports Pre-and post-training assessments to measure knowledge gains 	
3.2 Build and strengthen the existing M&E system within MoFND, NSO and other M&E entities in government offices	Ongoing – 2031	Programme teams, MoFND, NSO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional review completed Annual consolidated government M&E report produced 	

◀ Recommendation 3 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.3 Continue working with the government to improve the availability of robust data to support M&E and track achievements.	Ongoing – 2031	Programme teams, MoFND, NSO, line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of SDG-aligned indicators with updated data Data sets shared publicly/ with ministries 	
3.4 Develop a national M&E framework aligned with the forthcoming NDP and Agenda 2030 indicators	Jan 2026 – Dec 2026	Programme teams, MoFND, NSO, line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framework applied in the annual reporting cycle 	

RECOMMENDATION 4.



UNDP should enhance its support for institutional capacity development in Eritrea by advocating for a shift from fragmented, project-based approaches to a more coherent and long-term strategy aligned with the forthcoming NDP.

Management response: Accepted



Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Continue supporting the government in developing the NDP and identifying synergies across interventions for improved efficiency and impact	Sep 2025 – Dec 2026	Programme teams, MoFND, line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NDP finalized Number of cross-sector synergies identified and applied Percentage of cross-sector synergies identified and applied 	
4.2 Support the government in developing a national capacity-development strategy to guide NDP implementation	Jul 2026 – Dec 2027	Programme teams, MoFND, MLSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft strategy developed by mid-2027 Strategy validated and endorsed by Dec 2027 Number of institutions with capacity plans 	
4.3 Work within the UN system and the CF to support integrated government development priorities highlighted in the NDP	Oct 2025 – ongoing	Programme Heads, DRR/RR, MoFND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of joint UN programmes aligned with NDP priorities Number of joint reviews held annually 	

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.4 Establish a joint government–UNDP institutional capacity forum to coordinate, monitor and harmonize capacity-development initiatives across sectors	Jan 2026 – Dec 2028	Programme teams, MoFND, line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum established • Number of capacity initiatives reviewed annually • Annual joint capacity progress report produced 	

RECOMMENDATION 5.



UNDP should deepen its commitment to gender equality and LNOB by supporting inclusive institutional policies, scaling successful models and mainstreaming gender across all programmes.

Management response: Accepted



Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Support the development of the NDP to ensure rural areas—especially women—are prioritized (in line with the Presidential Statement and the National Charter)	Jan – Dec 2026	Programme Heads, Gender Head, MoFND, line ministries, NUEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDP finalized with gender and LNOB priorities integrated • Number of rural-focused consultations held • Percentage of NDP targets with explicit gender or LNOB focus • Training on inclusive policy development and gender-responsive budgeting 	
5.2 Mainstream gender in all development interventions	Oct 2026 – ongoing	Programme teams, Gender Head, MoFND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of projects reporting on LNOB outcomes • Number of programme staff trained on gender mainstreaming 	
5.3 Explore other funding opportunities to continue supporting GEN3 interventions, particularly in rural areas	Jan 2026 – Dec 2027	Programme teams, MoFND, other partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of funding proposals submitted • Amount of new funding secured • Number of rural women benefiting from GEN3 interventions 	

Key action(s)	Timeframe	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.4 Support the government in generating gender-disaggregated data for better M&E of gender interventions	Jul 2026 – Dec 2028	Programme teams, Gender Head, MoFND, NSO, line ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of surveys/ studies with gender-disaggregated data • Percentage of NDP indicators tracked with sex disaggregation • Annual government gender data report produced 	
5.5 Strengthen the institutional capacity of government ministries and local administrations to design, implement and monitor gender-responsive policies and programmes	Jan 2026 – Dec 2029	Programme teams, Gender Head, MoFND, NUEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of ministries/ local offices with trained gender focal points • Number of gender-responsive policies/ programmes developed • Annual capacity progress reports produced 	

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

ANNEXES



Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the Evaluation Resource Centre website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/25222>

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

Annex 2. Reconstructed Theory of Change for ICPE in Eritrea

Annex 3. Evaluation Matrix

Annex 4. Country Office at a Glance

Annex 5. Project List

Annex 6. Status of Country Programme Outcome and Output Indicators

Annex 7. Country Programme Performance Rating

Annex 8. Documents Consulted



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