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Evaluation

**Management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to
youth economic empowerment**

I. Introduction

1. In 2021, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP conducted the evaluation of UNDP support for youth economic empowerment (DP/2022/7), in accordance with its multi-year workplan, 2022-2025. The objective was to assess the results of past UNDP work against its goals as stated in strategic and programmatic documents, shape organizational learning, and inform the strategic direction of UNDP youth economic empowerment work in the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. The data used, collected in June and July 2021, cover the period from 2015 to mid-2021.

2. The primary focus of the evaluation is the UNDP contribution to decent work and livelihood creation for youth in programme countries. The evaluation understands youth economic empowerment as the capacity of young women and men to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth processes. It aims to gather evidence about the extent to which UNDP support and approaches had relevance, promoted coherence, contributed to effectiveness and sustainability, and fostered inclusiveness and innovation.

3. The evaluation is framed around a modified version of the theory of change developed for the UNDP Youth Global Programme, 2016-2021 – the first UNDP multi-level, multi-dimensional youth programmatic offer. The theory of change assesses the extent to which UNDP approaches have contributed to enhancing youth psychological, behavioural and economic empowerment, and created an enabling environment for poverty reduction and project interventions. The evaluation indicates that data was collected through analytics of corporate data, document review, interviews with key informant, a participatory narrative survey (via Sensemaker), and a global survey with youth organizations. It also included in-depth examination of twelve countries and three regional projects. Challenges and limitations acknowledged in the evaluation report include the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work, data scarcity, low evaluability, difficulty in mapping youth economic empowerment interventions and a compressed timeframe.



4. UNDP welcomes this first youth-focused thematic evaluation and its findings, conclusions and recommendations. The lessons from this independent evaluation will inform the renewed UNDP vision and offer on youth, including on youth economic empowerment, and contribute to implementing the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, across all signature solutions. UNDP will build on areas already identified as solid and will continue to strengthen the youth economic empowerment workstream and overall youth portfolio to respond to current, emerging and new demands.

II. Youth economic empowerment in the global development context

5. UNDP recognizes national and regional definitions and focuses on young people aged 15 to 24, 15 to 30 or 15 to 35, depending on specific contexts,¹ in the absence of a universally agreed definition of ‘youth’. UNDP understands youth empowerment as ‘an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and in their societies’.²

6. At 1.85 billion, the world has more young people than at any other time in history. Nine out of 10 young people live in programme countries. In many of these countries, 60-70 per cent of the population is below the age of 30. One in four young people is affected by violence or armed conflict.³ Young people are not a homogenous group and they face a wide array of complex development challenges and interlocked forms of discrimination, frequently involving negative assumptions about age, gender, abilities and respect; and significant barriers to their participation in public life, which leads them to be underrepresented in decision-making and development processes. They also represent a disproportionate number of the unemployed and are often impacted by a lack of access to quality and affordable public services, such as health and education.⁴ These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will have long-lasting impacts on the whole of societies and particular effects on young people.⁵ Indeed, 87 per cent of the world’s student population (as per March 2020) were kept away from schools and universities in more than 165 countries; anxiety and mental health concerns among young people increased; and girls and young women experienced a greater risk of domestic violence. Many young people have also experienced an impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their right to participate in public affairs.⁶ Civic space is closing, limiting the influence young people have on decisions in their communities and societies.

7. Young people tend to be more economically marginalized than adults, regarding employment, education, training, informality, and social protection.⁷ Young workers with disabilities,⁸ rural youth employed in the informal economy,⁹ and younger youth tend to be even more vulnerable.¹⁰ Inequalities accumulate throughout life and persist across generations. The emergence of a new generation of inequalities that are deepening power imbalances and

¹ UNDP, *UNDP Youth Strategy: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future (2014-2017)*, annex 1, pp. 47-48.

² UNDP, *UNDP Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development (Youth-GPS)*, 2016-2021.

³ A/72/761-S/2018/86, para. 8.

⁴ ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020*, 2020; United Nations General Assembly, *Youth and Human Rights – Report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, A/HRC/39/33, 2018.

⁵ United Nations, *Report by the Secretary-General: Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity*, 2020.

⁶ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience*, 2020; United Nations, *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space*, 2021.

⁷ ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020*, 2020.

⁸ United Nations, “Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19”, 2020.

⁹ United Nations, “Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition”, 2020.

¹⁰ ILO et al., on behalf of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, *Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19*, 2020.

impacting the life and agency of young people is being exacerbated by the climate¹¹ and the COVID-19 crisis.¹²

8. Young people – young women, in particular – are disproportionately affected by increasing wealth and income inequalities, and gender disparities are one of the most persistent forms of inequalities.¹³ Cultural practices, social norms, exclusion from decision-making processes, and unequal division of household responsibilities are some of the gendered barriers affecting young women’s efforts to grow social enterprises and access education and employment.¹⁴ Gender stereotypes continue to challenge the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment. While young women contribute to development and peace in communities and sometimes lead social movements, their leadership often remains less recognized, and they face exclusion from decision-making processes.¹⁵ In every age group, male members of parliament outnumber female members of parliament.¹⁶ The experience of violence and discrimination is likely to be different for young women, young men and youth from sexual and gender minorities.¹⁷ Many young people belong to multiple youth groups and are experiencing intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination, which impact the threats they experience from engaging in civic space.¹⁸ Broader cultural and social norms need to be addressed to better integrate gender equality in economic empowerment.

9. Despite complex challenges, young people are ready to play a critical role in sustainable development and peace and have already demonstrated their contribution. While young people are vulnerable to the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, they have showed resilience, leadership and both demanded and contributed to change as front-liners in the COVID-19 response and recovery in communities. They often lead their own initiatives, hold decision-makers accountable, and call for bold measures to ensure a sustainable, green, fairer recovery.¹⁹ Investing in youth volunteerism has also enabled partnerships with and an engagement of young people in response and recovery efforts.²⁰

10. There is momentum to enhance youth empowerment support and better listen to and partner with young people. In 2017, the United Nations Secretary-General and his Executive Committee prioritized youth and requested the development of the first system-wide United Nations strategy – Youth 2030. It was then developed by an inter-agency team, of which UNDP was part, and launched in 2018 with the objective “to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people in all their diversity around the world, and to ensure their engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks”.²¹ Since 2015, Member States have increasingly recognized the critical role of young people in sustainable development and sustaining peace across the pillars of the United Nations – development, human rights, and peace and security.²² Youth inclusion has been more

¹¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*, 2020; United Nations and World Bank Group, *Pathways for Peace*, 2018.

¹² United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, “Statement on Youth and COVID-19”, 2020.

¹³ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*, 2020.

¹⁴ United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), *The World Youth Report on Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda*, 2020.

¹⁵ The United Nations, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, 2018.

¹⁶ International Parliamentary Union, *Youth Participation in Parliaments*, 2021.

¹⁷ The United Nations, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, 2018.

¹⁸ United Nations, *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space*, 2021.

¹⁹ See, for example, the 16 x 16 blog, “Young people go the extra-mile to advance Goal 16 during the COVID-19 crisis”, 2020.

²⁰ United Nations Volunteers and UNDP, *Youth Volunteering: Supporting Young People’s Engagement in COVID-19 Response and Recovery*, 2021.

²¹ United Nations, *United Nations Youth 2030 Strategy*, 2018.

²² See for example, United Nations Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security; United Nations Human Rights Council, resolution A/HRC/39/33, Youth and Human Rights (2018); General Assembly resolution on policies and programmes involving youth, A/RES/74/121 (2020).

meaningful in Sustainable Development Goals (the Goals) implementation, monitoring and review mechanisms (such as the voluntary national reviews) and in the second generation of nationally determined contributions. Gradually, youth and future generations have become central in the work of the United Nations system, as illustrated in the Secretary-General's recent Call-to-Action for Human Rights (2020) and his report Our Common Agenda (2021). UNDP sees youth empowerment as both a democratic imperative and a smart investment.²³ Yet, important challenges remain, and further commitment to and investment in youth are still required to effectively address youth needs and aspirations and support the role of young people in sustainable development²⁴ and sustaining peace.²⁵

III. UNDP support to youth economic empowerment

11. The adoption of the first UNDP youth strategy, 2014-2017 – empowered youth, sustainable future – by the UNDP Executive Group marked a milestone for the organization and its partners, including youth. The strategy articulated the UNDP comparative advantage in advancing a comprehensive and integrated approach to youth, beyond sectoral and top-down approaches, and recognized youth economic empowerment as one of the pathways to advancing local economic development and sustainable development. It highlighted the need to focus on factors affecting both labour demand and labour supply and to promote a policy environment conducive to job creation for young people, with particular attention to decent jobs. The UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, put particular emphasis on youth as one of the ‘population groups’ experiencing inequalities and exclusion and for whom it was a priority to support voice and participation and the inclusion of specific development needs. The UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, reaffirmed the importance of youth-inclusion in strengthening effective, inclusive and accountable governance and youth engagement for the Goals. As evidenced in the midterm review of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021,²⁶ UNDP responded to development challenges with concentrated efforts and specifically “supported youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace in over 100 countries and territories”.

12. Following the launch of its youth strategy, UNDP prioritized the establishment of a global youth team (with one core staff) and the provision of direct funding to youth-led initiatives through grants, such as Big Idea implemented by Restless Development, to enhance youth-led data and accountability at local and national levels in the post-2015 context. Soon after, and in response to the 2030 Agenda and the first Security Council resolution on youth, peace and security, UNDP launched the Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace, 2016-2021. As the first UNDP global youth programmatic offer, the Youth Global Programme spearheaded a comprehensive approach to youth empowerment, going beyond traditional youth entrepreneurship, employment, and livelihoods initiatives, highlighting the importance of youth-inclusive governance, civic space, accountability and the role young women and men play in decision-making. It established itself as the main entry point for corporate services on youth, coordinating with regional initiatives and collaborating with more than 80 countries to enable cross-fertilization, coherence, positioning, partnership-building and representation of UNDP in all relevant youth inter-agency processes. The Youth Global Programme played a key role in mainstreaming the UNDP comprehensive approach to youth empowerment in the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy, which also includes a priority area on economic empowerment through decent work. The Youth Global Programme actively contributed to the development and implementation of new flagship UNDP initiatives

²³ See for example, UNDP and Restless Development, on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network for Youth Development (UNIANYD), *Guiding Principles for Supporting Young People as Critical Agents of Change in the 2030 Agenda*, 2017; the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID)-civil society organizations youth working group, *Youth Participation in Development*, 2010.

²⁴ Remarks by the Deputy Secretary-General on the occasion of her briefing on the implementation of the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy to Member States (4 October 2021).

²⁵ Report of the Secretary-General, *Youth, Peace and Security*, S/2020/167, 2020.

²⁶ DP/2020/8.

advancing the positive role young people play in development and peace, such as the Climate Promise,²⁷ the 16x16 initiative,²⁸ as well as inter-agency partnerships such as Generation Unlimited,²⁹ through which 36 Generation Unlimited Youth Challenges were hosted on youth entrepreneurship, skills development and youth-led innovation; a new joint programme on youth, peace and security with UNFPA; a joint project with United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) on youth, peace and security mainstreaming in youth policies; and new collaborations with the private sector, such as Generation17³⁰ with Samsung. UNDP is a founding member of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, co-leading with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on youth and fragility, a collaboration further strengthened with the adoption of a UNDP-ILO joint framework for action prioritizing decent jobs for youth.

13. UNDP has played a role as thought leader on youth economic empowerment by developing and disseminating knowledge products and guidance material for development practitioners on youth and inequalities, youth and climate action, youth employment in fragile situations, youth, peace and security, and youth and Sustainable Development Goals implementation, among others. In addition, UNDP has championed youth as part of key conferences and processes relating to poverty reduction, such as the youth track of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and the annual Economic and Social Council Youth Forum. As recognized in document DP/2021/9, “UNDP has prioritized the youth, peace and security agenda, including in conflict-affected contexts (e.g., Sierra Leone, Central America, western Balkans, Mali and Madagascar). UNDP supports capacity development and internal capacities on youth, co-leading the development of the first United Nations handbook on youth, peace and security programming,³¹ and co-hosting the first United Nations learning forum on youth, peace and security with UNDP country offices, political missions and other stakeholders. As a thought leader, UNDP co-hosted consultations with 4,000+ young peacebuilders in all five regions as part of the development of the Security Council-mandated progress study on youth, peace and security”.

14. UNDP has increased its engagement and support for inter-agency pooled funding mechanisms, for example through the Peacebuilding Fund, particularly the fund’s Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative. UNDP has also strengthened youth-inclusion in programme support in the UNDP funding windows which are a pooled, flexible funding mechanism that channels allocations to country offices. In 2020, UNDP introduced a specific criterion in the governance, peacebuilding, crisis and resilience sub-window on the positive role young people play in sustainable development and peace; and the technical review process for project proposals now includes youth focal points. Since, 53 projects have either focused or had a strong emphasis on youth, totalling more than \$42 million (as of October 2021). Eleven projects were dedicated youth initiatives (approximately \$6.7 million), while 42 projects were youth-inclusive and youth-sensitive (approximately \$35.3 million).

15. In addition to interventions covered in the evaluation report, examples illustrative of UNDP support include initiatives and projects to: (a) accompany South Africa as it seeks to renew its social welfare system, enabling increased efficiency through formative research on links between social grants, inclusive society and poverty reduction with a focus on youth; (b) forge partnerships with existing business incubators in Mogadishu and Hargeisa to deliver training activities on mobile application development to young graduates and students in the context of the Future Ready Initiative in Somalia; (c) improve young people’s capacities to manage microenterprises and process local products in Burkina Faso; (d) convene youth camps across Tunisia, mobilizing 3,000 young people to identify solutions to complex development challenges and support Sustainable Development Goals acceleration; (e) support the capacity

²⁷ <https://www.undp.org/climate-promise>.

²⁸ <https://www.undp.org/publications/16-x-16-initiative>.

²⁹ <https://www.generationunlimited.org>.

³⁰ <https://generation17.undp.org>.

³¹ www.youth4peace.info/YPSHandbook.

development of 1,500 young innovators through the Arab Youth Leadership Programme; and (f) enable smooth education-to-work transition for young people, with nearly 76,000 youth provided with employability skills and 42,000 placed in jobs in India since 2015.

16. The UNDP accelerator labs, a flagship initiative across 91 locations, has invested in collective intelligence methods such as crowd-mapping, citizen reporting and mobile phone surveys to engage and reach young people whose voices are often not counted. The UNDP Ethiopia accelerator lab uses an ethnographic approach to map local solutions driven by young Ethiopians who are turning waste into livelihoods. The UNDP Nepal accelerator lab partnered with Kathmandu Metropolitan City to build the Kathmandu Business Hub, a hub designed to accelerate the ideas and skills of young entrepreneurs. In Iraq, artificial intelligence was used to simulate the reality of youth and unemployment challenge in the country and open up young people's own vision to a broad range of career paths.

17. In recognition that young people should be supported as powerful advocates for gender equality, UNDP has made deliberate efforts to promote and support young women's empowerment and gender equality throughout the youth portfolio. At the global level, UNDP supported young female activists as part of the 16x16 initiative, the Gender Equality Forum with young feminists in Tunisia, and the collection and analysis of new data on the role of young women in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism (Kenya, Somalia, Pakistan). It also leveraged existing funding mechanisms (Peacebuilding Fund, Global Acceleration Instrument) to support interventions with young women. In its current gender equality strategy, 2018-2021, UNDP focuses on addressing systemic barriers to gender equality, including structural obstacles to women's economic empowerment, reducing women's disproportionate burden of unpaid work, and promoting women's participation and leadership in all forms of decision-making. At the regional level, UNDP has been implementing three programmes (Youth Co:Lab in Asia and the Pacific, Youth Connekt in Africa, and the Arab States regional youth leadership programme) which integrate a gender equality dimension. In Viet Nam, UNDP has supported the capacity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer/questioning, intersex (LGBTQI+) civil society organizations in advocacy for legislative and policy change through the development and implementation of the Vietnamese LGBT Leadership Development Program (ViLEAD) capacity development model. At the institutional level, the Regional Bureau for Africa established the African young women leaders fellowship programme.

18. Support to youth empowerment and partnerships with young people were and are part of UNDP efforts to support countries in addressing the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the impact of the crisis on public health, the economy and governance at large. Youth were included in the UNDP country-level response: from Zimbabwe where UNDP and ILO supported youth inclusion in national priority-setting on climate policies, just transition and environmental action in context of COVID-19, to Nepal where UNDP collaborated with the Association of Youth Organizations of Nepal to debunk myths and counter information pollution, to the Arab States region where youth development delegates' created COVID-19 response proposals in 10 UNDP country offices of which two were implemented by UNDP. More recently, UNDP collaborated with the Youth as Researchers Initiative led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), partnering with young people to investigate the COVID-19 response and impact. At the global and inter-agency level, UNDP co-led the working group on the rights of future generations, especially climate justice, as a follow-up to the Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights.

19. In line with the UNDP holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development, youth is supported across thematic areas and signature solutions, in particular the Global Policy Network inequalities task team and support to country offices through the thematic portfolios on youth empowerment, governance, inclusive growth, livelihood and recovery, and gender equality. In Africa, there is increasing interest from partners and donors to invest in youth empowerment as a strategic component of peacebuilding, stabilization and socioeconomic programmes, which is illustrative of the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus

approach taken by UNDP. UNDP also provides support to national stakeholders in formulating youth comprehensive responsive frameworks, policies and interventions, to strengthen enabling environments, for instance in Sierra Leone.

20. UNDP has made efforts to specifically support young people as partners in setting the future of development. In Nepal, a youth strategy has put young people at the core of the country office's contribution to sustainable development, and principles for youth meaningful engagement were co-created together with youth. The UNDP Youth Sounding Board in Kenya was established to inform the priorities of the UNDP country office and increase meaningful youth engagement. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Youth Leadership Programme facilitated youth inputs into the country programme document development process. In the western Balkans, a youth advisory board informed project design and co-created a study on youth peace perceptions, including with regard to economic inclusion (in collaboration with Shared Futures). In Honduras, youth organizations were a part of the committee that prepared the country office human development report in 2021.

21. UNDP has gradually increased the capacity of its staff to support youth empowerment, including youth economic empowerment, through the provision of high-quality and timely guidance material and learning opportunities. UNDP developed *Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook (2021)* together with UNFPA, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)-Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and Folke Bernadotte Academy, which has been translated into an online course by the United Nations System Staff College. Accessible, youth-specific and youth co-created information is provided to a large network of practitioners and partners, through the youth Sparkblue dashboard, the global knowledge platform youth4peace.info, an internal UNDP4Youth teams space and the UNDP newsletter update on youth empowerment, 'The Loop'. Training and learning opportunities include youth mainstreaming through UNDP communities of practice, a youth segment in the forthcoming UNDP training package on peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and youth sessions in induction workshops for peace and development advisors and junior professional officers. UNDP actively contributes to system-wide learning, through the joint working group on the implementation of the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy, including by co-developing a toolkit and action guide for United Nations country teams on youth (2021), publicly available on the Youth 2030 platform. With the creation of a youth profile in the Global Policy Network roster of consultants, UNDP has increased its available youth expertise and expertise on youth. Furthermore, UNDP supports a young workforce within the organization, through a new graduate programme, paid internships, the Arab States Youth Development Delegate Fellowship, and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV)-UNDP Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities.

22. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, a youth marker is a part of the leaving no one behind marker, introduced to track overall project expenditures. In addition, checklists are included in the results-oriented annual report template to indicate engagement with youth and/or for youth empowerment as well as indicators relating to youth in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and the integrated results and resources framework, among others.

IV. Findings and conclusions of the evaluation

23. UNDP welcomes the evaluation as useful in informing its work on youth empowerment, including on economic empowerment, and highly values opportunities to continuously enhance its work.

24. UNDP also welcomes the recognition of the unique UNDP role in promoting youth empowerment and its multi-disciplinary approach, as well as findings relating to its high awareness of youth-related complex development challenges, strategic leadership in global platforms, collaboration with a multitude of actors engaging on youth-specific issues, high external coherence, active role in agenda-setting and coordination, and efforts amplifying the

voices of youth. The clear UNDP vision anchored in a human rights-based approach and aligned with the Youth 2030 strategy is recognized.

25. UNDP notes the evidence demonstrating that it has placed youth at the centre of its COVID-19 response, with around 100 country offices reporting youth-related activities – the majority of which supported youth employment, entrepreneurship and livelihood enhancement.

26. UNDP appreciates the recognition of its significant contribution to promoting inclusive and effective downstream youth self-employment and entrepreneurship, which have contributed greatly to psychological and behavioural empowerment, evidenced by the positive assessment it received from youth-led and youth-based organizations. UNDP takes note of the evidence that social innovation in youth entrepreneurship brings an added value for youth economic empowerment, with room for improvement to better address access to decent jobs and productive employment.

27. UNDP welcomes the recognition of its efforts to adopt a cross-sectoral approach between youth economic empowerment, key thematic areas and all six signature solutions, which has yielded some encouraging results, and the successful facilitation by the UNDP Youth Global Programme in mainstreaming youth in programming. UNDP also welcomes the high appreciation of support the global youth team has provided, as expressed by both internal and external interviewees at headquarters and at the regional level, and the catalytic role the UNDP youth strategy has played, despite lack of dedicated human resources and uneven institutionalization of youth focal points.

28. UNDP notes the reference to the increasing adoption of an evidence-based approach, resolute efforts to integrate and mainstream the principle of leaving no one behind across regions, and a growing trend to engage youth in programming and co-creation. UNDP particularly notes the acknowledgement of the importance of youth engagement in peacebuilding and in conflict-affected contexts.

29. UNDP acknowledges the finding that it has played an important role in supporting the development and implementation of institutional and policy frameworks conducive to youth employment and entrepreneurship in contexts that benefited from a positive national policy climate and political will. UNDP notes that all regional programme documents have considered youth with varying degrees of comprehensiveness and also notes that flagship regional programmes have shown a good level of replication and expansion.

30. UNDP appreciates the recognition of the many relevant partnerships with other United Nations entities, youth organizations and the private sector, in addition to Governments, demonstrating new ways of working beyond the traditional donor-recipient relationship, to truly co-create. Key global and regional partnerships have played an important role in cascading inter-agency collaboration in regions and countries and have stimulated new inter-agency collaboration in countries, even if more efforts are needed at country level.

31. UNDP notes the emphasis on efforts to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, tools and practices, from the roll-out of a youth-inclusive leaving-no-one-behind marker to the development of Youth 2030 scorecards. The artificial intelligence-powered analysis of successes and challenges for learning lessons was made available to all staff to support analysis. Yet, more efforts are still needed to adequately capture the UNDP contribution to youth economic empowerment at corporate, regional and country levels.

32. UNDP management would like to highlight the following points:

- Transformative elements built into the UNDP youth strategy and UNDP strategic plans require continuing efforts to adapt programming and financing modalities, capabilities and results frameworks. UNDP management is firmly committed to continuing the

institutionalization of youth under the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy.

- Whole-of-society approaches have been used, in particular since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, to address complex development challenges such as youth employment and empowerment. In line with the strategic plan, which calls for integrated approaches, UNDP has been engaging with state and non-state actors in a participatory manner to foster an enabling environment that empowers youth as agents of change; and to apply multiple signature solutions that cut across practice areas to support and elevate the Decent Jobs for Youth agenda.
- UNDP is fully in agreement with the need to invest in young people as positive agents of change and partners, and it has been a strong advocate of that approach, including by developing with youth partners the inter-agency guiding principles on youth and Sustainable Development Goals, which specifically call for partnerships with youth in the context of Sustainable Development Goals implementation, monitoring and accountability, and throughout the programme cycle. Partnerships, with youth and youth organizations, have been vital. In the UNDP global youth questionnaire, in 2019-2020 a majority of responding country offices confirmed they engaged young people in the design stage of the programme cycle and through youth-led platforms and constituencies, and more than 40 per cent of respondents answered that they engaged with youth through formalized partnerships with youth-led organizations. Programmes and projects have been designed to ensure inclusion and meaningful engagement of young people from marginalized groups; for instance, in 2020 UNDP launched an innovative “Targeting men, transforming masculinities” initiative that aims to transform social norms and challenge expressions of patriarchal power through a bottom-up approach, focused on youth participation in Ukraine.
- It is widely recognized, in UNDP and beyond, that work for and with youth remains under-resourced.³² UNDP has operated with a small global youth team (one core staff member, a position created in 2014) to coordinate youth empowerment across all thematic areas of work and an uneven and limited number of dedicated focal points responsible for coordination at regional and country levels. The contribution of partners through UNV, junior professional officers (Denmark, Italy), and secondments (for example, through the partnership with Sweden and Folke Bernadotte Academy) is highly appreciated.
- The UNDP expanding and next generation policy and programming support advancing youth empowerment has already had a positive impact on how UNDP is perceived and trusted by young people, and how it has internalized important principles in how to engage meaningfully with youth within the organization. The establishment of a youth profile on the Global Policy Network roster of youth experts who can contribute to all thematic areas of work of UNDP across development settings, and the establishment of youth platforms, are relevant examples.

33. UNDP fully accepts all evaluation recommendations:

- (a) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 1**, which indicates that *UNDP should prioritize interconnection and synergies between employability, job creation and enabling environment interventions, instead of standalone interventions focusing on capacity development or entrepreneurship.*

UNDP will continue to support comprehensive, integrated and innovative approaches to respond to evolving youth development challenges, by taking measures to develop an updated offer to tackle inequalities, informality and the lack of social protection. A solid component on youth empowerment will be included in the new UNDP informal economy

³² Report of the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security, S/2020/167, 2020.

and social protection corporate offers, and UNDP will continue to nurture multi-stakeholder partnerships with and on youth, including initiatives focusing on decent jobs for youth, youth entrepreneurship, youth employment, skills development and the role of youth as agents of change, including the Decent Jobs for Youth initiative with ILO and the implementation of the UNDP-ILO Framework for Action, Generation Unlimited with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in particular in the Sahel, and Youth Connekt, the regional Arab States youth project, Youth Co:Lab, and a joint initiative on youth, peace and security with UNFPA.

- (b) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 2**, which indicates that UNDP should detail its programmatic approach toward youth economic empowerment by developing a guidance document that clarifies UNDP ambition in various contexts and provides practical guidance for strategic positioning, coherence, and programme design and implementation.

UNDP is already developing new global guidance on youth economic empowerment, building on existing guidance (youth employment in peacebuilding, green jobs, decent jobs for youth, etc.) and lessons learned from recent programming, articulating the UNDP comparative advantage, proposing entry points for policy and programming support related to all signature solutions, and promoting a comprehensive approach. Such cutting-edge global guidance will then be piloted in at least three regions, in diverse development settings, building on existing regional and country initiatives and ongoing partnerships.

- (c) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 3**, which indicates that UNDP should take measures to ensure organization-wide coherence in its institutional architecture for youth across regions.

UNDP will take relevant measures to ensure that regional and country offices identify and support a stronger network of youth focal points. Mechanisms have been uneven depending on regions and steps have been taken to address this issue, resulting in an increase in the number of youth positions at the regional level in the context of implementing the previous Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. The network of youth focal points at country level has recently been enhanced in Africa, with the establishment of a regional youth Community of Practitioners across 46 countries. At the global level, the youth team has leveraged the Global Policy Network and established global youth spaces, including by recently enhancing its internal and external knowledge management with a Sparkblue dashboard and a dedicated news update for staff and partners. UNDP will continue to strengthen coordination and effective mainstreaming, including by supporting relevant youth onboarding packages/learning modules across the organization. It will also continue to invest in youth advisory groups/sounding boards/platforms at all levels, building on the successes of the UNDP Youth Global Programme (16x16 initiative, Generation17), Youth Co:Lab, Youth Connekt, the Arab Youth Leadership Programme, among others, and in line with the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy, to enhance UNDP programming and operations and its own organizational readiness and development effectiveness.

- (d) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 4**, which indicates that UNDP should systematically recognize the different needs of young women and young men and how these intersect with age, ability, ethnicity/indigeneity, locality (rural/urban) and other markers. The organization should prioritize support that aspires to contribute to changes in social norms and that addresses the root causes of gender inequality, exclusion and discrimination specifically connected to youth.

UNDP is firmly committed to the prioritization of human rights, gender equality and leaving no one behind in the context of youth empowerment. UNDP has taken a number of deliberate steps to mainstream gender throughout its programmatic responses and will continue to do so. In its gender equality strategy, 2022-2025, UNDP will further seek to focus on structural causes of inequalities, deepen gender and power analysis, and

prioritize its work on transforming social norms. UNDP will develop new dedicated guidance on youth empowerment, gender equality and intersectionality, to enhance policy advisory services and support new programming, and support more systematic youth mainstreaming and gender mainstreaming in relevant tools, projects and programmes.

- (e) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 5**, which indicates that the renewed UNDP vision on youth economic empowerment needs to leverage strategic partnerships and foster youth agency. This should necessarily include considering youth as agents and partners in their own right and not merely as beneficiaries.

To further leverage its unique convening power and comparative advantage and invest in youth agency, UNDP will convene a UNDP youth empowerment partnership forum with a range of actors – Governments, youth, private sector, among others – with a view to present promising practices through which UNDP can support youth leadership in achieving the Goals, discuss new approaches to youth empowerment, convene partners to renew commitments and forge new alliances, and acknowledge and spotlight young people’s leadership. In response to the Youth 2030 strategy and the first report of the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (2020), UNDP will continue to invest and scale up its investment in youth leadership in projects and programmes directly, including by supporting grant programmes in the context of global, regional and country initiatives.

- (f) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 6**, which indicates that UNDP should strengthen its results framework and its monitoring and evaluation practices to enable the organization to coherently measure, monitor, report and learn from its contribution to youth economic empowerment and more broadly to youth.

UNDP will take steps to improve existing monitoring and evaluation tools to better take into account youth economic empowerment and youth more broadly, including the development of a UNDP-specific youth scorecard. It will strengthen the consistent application of the leaving-no-one-behind youth marker in conjunction with the introduction of Quantum in 2022, a new cloud-based enterprise resource planning system. And it will support important monitoring and evaluation efforts in the context of implementing Youth 2030 (United Nations entity-based scorecard reporting; United Nations country team scorecard reporting; development of United Nations system-wide youth marker, etc.), the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review (which includes Youth 2030 indicators) and reporting on the common indicator (youth, peace and security frameworks with UNFPA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) under UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, integrated results and resources framework.

- (g) **UNDP fully accepts recommendation 7**, which indicates that the UNDP renewed vision on youth economic empowerment should be accompanied by a clearly structured resource mobilization strategy.

UNDP recognizes the need to develop a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy on youth and will take steps to develop a renewed global corporate youth strategy/vision in line with its Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and an accompanying resource mobilization strategy for youth empowerment. UNDP will explore opportunities to identify diversified sources of funding to adequately and predictably finance the youth portfolio, including youth economic empowerment and opportunities to receive additional core resources for youth staff and programming, as appropriate.

V. Future UNDP support for youth economic empowerment

34. The future of UNDP support for youth economic empowerment is closely linked to the future of UNDP comprehensive support to youth empowerment and future generations, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and of UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

35. With a target of supporting the empowerment of 100 million poor by 2025, the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, highlights how UNDP will address the multidimensionality of poverty, investing in assets, services and social protection across sectors and promoting job creation, social protection and social safety nets for low-income people. With partners such as ILO and UNICEF, UNDP notes in the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, that it will “scale up engagement on youth economic empowerment, focusing on decent jobs for youth, green jobs, social entrepreneurship and protecting informal workers”. The Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, also recognizes a “positive face of social disruption, evident in more vibrant citizen activism, like youth movements on climate change, collective action against gender and race discrimination”. It highlights that “lessons from COVID-19 show the potential, for example, for stronger and more inclusive civic engagement, digitally transacted, between Governments, parliaments and young people” and explicitly refers to the UNDP objective to “help promote the rights of future generations and amplify young people’s voices in decisions on climate action and the future of their communities, through capacity development, youth political participation and support to young innovators”. Beyond explicit references to youth under the poverty and governance signature solutions, youth economic empowerment is of relevance to all UNDP signature solutions.

36. Transformative approaches will need to include support to enabling environments (policies, regulations, markets), governance, addressing structural inequalities, and ensuring gender-responsiveness and inclusion, even more systematically. While access to meaningful and reliable employment is important for the socioeconomic empowerment of young people, ‘empowerment’ should be understood as part of a broader response to the exclusion of young people from decision-making processes, the wider economy and broader development processes.³³ An overall focus on youth empowerment rather than on youth economic empowerment is the comparative advantage of UNDP. Goal 16, for instance, represents a critical opportunity for tackling underlying governance issues and advancing youth empowerment as a whole. In its renewed youth empowerment strategy, UNDP will articulate this vision, its comparative advantage and key entry points, connecting to each signature solution, to ensure an even more systematic and meaningful youth engagement in UNDP work and better impact. UNDP already prioritizes interconnection and synergies between employability, job creation and enabling environment interventions in many contexts. In Chad, the recently developed youth programme builds on a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach to youth socioeconomic empowerment, investing not only in support to entrepreneurship and capacity building, but also to professional training, mentoring, and fellowship/volunteerism mechanisms that are complementary to entrepreneurship programmes.

37. UNDP development efforts will seek to recognize the needs of young women and contribute to transforming social norms and tackling gender inequalities in a more systematic and measurable way. In its gender equality strategy, 2022-2025, UNDP will strengthen its focus on structural causes of inequalities, deepen gender and power analysis, and prioritize its work on transforming social norms. UNDP will further integrate issues associated with the needs of young women as part of a more granular intersectional approach.

38. The pipeline for the next few years will drive a diverse geographic and thematic focus in the following areas, among others: informality, social protection, green jobs, digital jobs, future of work, women’s economic empowerment, energy, climate ambition and environmental justice for future generations, innovation and civic space. On climate, notably, UNDP will build

³³ United Nations, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, 2018.

on its current support to 120 countries and territories through its Climate Promise, the world's largest offer of support for the enhancement of countries' nationally determined contributions. While more than half of first generation nationally determined contributions failed to mention children, youth, or future generations, 80 per cent of Climate Promise countries now prioritize youth in their enhanced climate pledges (e.g., Argentina), including by focusing on green jobs, youth in decision-making, and digital participation.

39. UNDP will continue to collaborate with a myriad of diverse small and large, traditional and non-traditional partners that are pursuing youth economic empowerment initiatives or have keen interests in engaging with UNDP. UNDP will solidify its inclusive and strong partnerships across the United Nations system, with multilateral development banks, Governments, other international and regional organizations, the private sector, philanthropy and youth. As a priority, UNDP will explore new ways of more directly supporting youth-led initiatives (funding windows, new grant programmes for youth, etc.) and will enhance its engagement with the international financial institutions (e.g., Islamic Development Bank, World Bank).

40. In the spirit of listening to and working better with youth, UNDP will continue to demonstrate its firm commitment to working on its own ability to be 'fit for youth'. UNDP management will support flagship youth initiatives and partnerships. Deploying more dedicated youth capacities throughout UNDP, at all levels, will be essential to enhance UNDP support to youth empowerment, including youth economic empowerment. UNDP will further enhance its institutionalized engagement with young people and youth organizations. Strengthening the UNDP monitoring and evaluation framework and tools and reporting on dedicated indicators on youth will be essential to better capture results and achieve impact. Investments made today in youth, and the extent to which they are meaningfully engaged, will shape the future of societies.

Annex. Key evaluation recommendations and UNDP management response

Recommendation 1. UNDP should prioritize interconnection and synergies between employability, job creation and enabling environment interventions, instead of standalone interventions focusing on capacity development or entrepreneurship.				
Management response:				
<p>UNDP fully accepts the recommendation. UNDP is already committed to promoting portfolio approaches on youth employment and empowerment, addressing the bottlenecks and vulnerabilities of the ecosystem in which they evolve, while promoting the drivers that are transformative. The UNDP focus is to protect and empower youth with integrated packages of services (social protection, business development services, labour market solutions, youth-responsive policy making) for higher productivity, innovative activities, decent jobs and investments that carry strong social, economic and environmental benefits.</p> <p>UNDP will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include a solid component on youth empowerment in the new UNDP informal economy and social protection corporate offers; and • continue to nurture multi-stakeholder partnerships with and on youth, including initiatives focusing on decent jobs for youth, youth entrepreneurship, youth employment, skills development, and the role of youth as agents of change. 				
Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Include a solid component on youth empowerment in the new UNDP informal economy facility and social protection corporate offer.	June 2022	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) regional bureaux country offices		<i>Initiated</i>
1.2 Continue to nurture and scale up support to comprehensive youth economic empowerment-related initiatives, in particular through partnerships on youth economic empowerment with United Nations entities, the private sector and youth at country, regional and global levels.	June 2023	BPPS regional bureaux country offices		<i>Initiated</i>
Recommendation 2. UNDP should detail its programmatic approach toward youth economic empowerment by developing a guidance document that clarifies UNDP ambition in various contexts and provides practical guidance for strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation.				
Management response:				
<p>UNDP fully accepts the recommendation and is already developing a new global guidance on youth economic empowerment.</p> <p>UNDP will:</p>				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a new global guidance on youth economic empowerment to support strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation; and roll-out the new global guidance on youth economic empowerment in at least three regions, in diverse development settings. 				
2.1 Develop a new global guidance on youth economic empowerment to support strategic positioning, coherence and programme design and implementation.	December 2022	BPPS Crisis Bureau regional bureaux country offices		<i>Initiated</i>
2.2 Roll out of the new global guidance on youth economic empowerment in at least three regions in diverse development settings.	December 2023	BPPS Crisis Bureau regional bureaux country offices		
Recommendation 3. UNDP should take measures to ensure organization-wide coherence in its institutional architecture for youth across regions.				
Management response:				
UNDP fully accepts the recommendation and will continue to take incremental measures to institutionalize youth further.				
UNDP will:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take relevant measures to ensure that regional and country offices identify and support a stronger network of youth focal points; continue to invest in youth advisory groups/sounding boards/platforms at all levels, building on the successes of the UNDP Youth Global Programme (16x16 initiative, Generation17), Youth Co:Lab, Youth Connekt, the Arab Youth Leadership Programme, etc., and in line with the Youth 2030 strategy, to enhance UNDP programming and operations and its organizational readiness and development effectiveness. 				
3.1 Confirm/reconfirm the UNDP focal points system on youth and youth economic empowerment specifically, with dedicated terms of reference, at regional and country levels, and provide onboarding packages/learning modules on youth/ youth economic empowerment .	June 2023	regional bureaux BPPS Bureau for Management Services (BMS)		<i>Initiated</i>
3.2 Continue to strengthen youth advisory groups/sounding boards/platforms at all levels to meaningfully engage young people in partnership-building and policy and programme support.	June 2023	BPPS regional bureaux country offices Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy (BERA)		<i>Initiated</i>
Recommendation 4: UNDP should systematically recognize the different needs of young women and how these intersect with age, ability, ethnicity/indigeneity, locality (rural/urban) and other markers. The organization should prioritize support that aspires to contribute to changes in social norms and that addresses the root causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination.				
Management response:				
UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.				

<p>Youth consultations have been organized in the context of developing the new gender equality strategy, 2022–2025, which will aim to prioritize supporting change in social norms. It will integrate stronger emphasis on intersectionality that will include young women, while ensuring strengthened support for women’s economic empowerment.</p> <p>UNDP will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop new dedicated guidance on youth empowerment, gender equality and intersectionality, to enhance policy advisory services; • support new programming and more systematic youth mainstreaming and gender mainstreaming in relevant tools, projects and programmes. 				
4.1 Update guidance on youth empowerment, gender equality and intersectionality to strengthen analysis and promote gender-transformative programming.	December 2022	BPPS regional bureaux country offices Crisis Bureau		
3.2 Support youth mainstreaming in relevant women’s economic empowerment tools, programmes and projects as well as gender mainstreaming in relevant youth economic empowerment tools, programmes and projects.	December 2023	BPPS regional bureaux country offices		
<p>Recommendation 5. The renewed UNDP vision on youth economic empowerment needs to further leverage strategic partnerships to foster youth agency, considering youth as agents of change and partners for development in their own right and not merely as beneficiaries.</p>				
<p>Management response:</p> <p>UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>To further leverage its unique convening power and comparative advantage and invest in youth agency, UNDP will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • convene a UNDP youth empowerment partnership forum with a range of actors – Governments, youth, the private sector, etc., with a view to present promising practices through which UNDP supports youth leadership in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, discuss new approaches to youth empowerment, convene partners to renew commitments and forge new alliances, and acknowledge and spotlight young people’s leadership; • continue to invest and scale up its investment in youth leadership in projects and programmes directly, including by supporting grant programmes in the context of global, regional and country initiatives, in response to the United Nations Youth 2030 strategy and the first report of the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (2020). 				
5.1 Convene a UNDP youth empowerment and future generations partnership forum with a range of key actors, including Governments, young leaders, youth organizations, movements and networks.	September 2022	BPPS regional bureaux BERA		
5.2. Enhance support to youth partnerships and youth-led initiatives for achievement of the	December 2023	BPPS regional bureaux		<i>Initiated</i>

Sustainable Development Goals, including as part of funding window projects and grant programmes for youth.		country offices BERA		
Recommendation 6: UNDP needs to strengthen its results framework and its monitoring and evaluation practices for adequate tracking of youth economic empowerment results and expenditures.				
Management response:				
<p>UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to strengthen its results framework and its monitoring and evaluation practices to enable the organization to coherently measure, monitor, report and learn from its contribution to youth economic empowerment and more broadly to youth.</p> <p>For this, UNDP will take steps to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve existing monitoring and evaluation tools to better take into account youth economic empowerment and youth more broadly, including the development of a UNDP-specific youth scorecard; strengthen the consistent application of youth leaving-no-one-behind marker in conjunction with the introduction of Quantum in 2022, a new cloud-based enterprise resource planning system; support important monitoring and evaluation efforts in the context of the implementation of Youth 2030 (United Nations entity-based scorecard reporting; United Nations country team scorecard reporting; development of United Nations system-wide youth marker, etc.), the 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy (which includes Youth 2030 indicators) and reporting on the common indicator (youth, peace and security frameworks with UNFPA and UN-Women) under the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, integrated results and resources framework. 				
6.1 In coordination with the Youth 2030 Secretariat, develop a youth scorecard specific to UNDP to measure progress on the implementation of the United Nations Youth 20203 strategy.	December 2022	BPPS		
6.2 Strengthen the consistent application of the youth leaving-no-one-behind marker through the provision of robust guidance and randomized quality assurance.	December 2023	BPPS regional bureaux		
6.3 Support monitoring and evaluation efforts in the implementation of Youth 2030 strategy (United Nations entity scorecard, United Nations country team scorecard) and reporting on common indicators (Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, integrated results and resources framework and the 2020 quadrennial review)	December 2025	BPPS regional bureaux		<i>Initiated</i>

<p>Recommendation 7: The renewed UNDP vision on youth economic empowerment should be accompanied by a clearly structured resource mobilization strategy.</p>				
<p>Management response:</p> <p>UNDP fully accepts the recommendation. The UNDP approach to youth and resource mobilization and funding needs are not limited to youth economic empowerment. UNDP therefore recognizes the need to develop a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy on youth overall.</p> <p>UNDP will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy on youth overall and will take steps to develop a renewed global corporate youth strategy/vision in line with UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and an accompanying resource mobilization strategy for youth empowerment; and • explore opportunities to identify diversified sources of funding to adequately and predictably finance the youth portfolio (including youth economic empowerment), including opportunities to receive additional core resources for youth staff and programming, as appropriate. 				
7.1 Develop a renewed global corporate UNDP youth strategy/vision with an accompanying resource-mobilization/partnership-building strategy.	December 2022	BPPS regional bureaux Crisis Bureau BERA BMS		
7.2 Explore diversified sources of funding and mechanism to adequately and predictably finance the youth portfolio (including youth economic empowerment)	December 2022	BPPS regional bureaux		