

**UNDP management commentaries to the**

**2018 Annual Report on Evaluation**

**Introduction**

UNDP is pleased to provide its management commentaries to the 2018 annual report on evaluation [DP/2019/16]. UNDP management welcomes the report and would like to thank the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) for the close collaboration and the high-quality work done in 2018, which helps UNDP strengthen its organizational learning, accountability, transparency and overall performance and results.

2018 marked the first year of implementation for the Strategic Plan (SP) 2018-2021. The SP set out a new direction for UNDP to effectively support countries achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through new innovative solutions and ways of working, while building on its strengths and expertise, relationships and **presence on the ground**. The formulation of the SP drew on lessons extracted from programme and project implementation, results and performance factor analyses, as well as findings and recommendations from audits, external multilateral and bilateral reviews, and independent and decentralized evaluations. UNDP took particular account of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the [*evaluation of the Strategic Plan, global programme and regional programmes 2014-2017*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/7850) and the [*joint assessment of institutional effectiveness*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/7908),conducted by the IEO and the Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI). Recommendations related to for example the importance of continuing to build a solid organizational results culture, results-based budgeting, enhanced value for money and programme quality are being addressed by UNDP. Annex 3 of the SP 2018-21 presented a high-level summary of how UNDP incorporated lessons from the previous SP period (2014-17)[[1]](#footnote-1). UNDP’s 2018 Annual report of the Administrator presents results achieved during the first year of implementation of the SP 2018-21.

In accordance with Executive Board decision (2015/18), which called on the IEO to expand their coverage of UNDP country programmes, UNDP received four Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) in 2018, with the remaining 2018 ICPEs expected to be received in 2019. UNDP received from IEO and contributed to three thematic evaluations and the revision process of the evaluation chapter of the UNDP Handbook on planning, monitoring and evaluating for development results (the “Yellow Handbook”) from 2009.

UNDP’s most senior decision-making bodies, the Executive Group (EG) and the Organizational Performance Group (OPG), continued to lead efforts to ensure that learning from evaluation is at the center of the agenda and to inform decision-making by systematically reviewing new evaluation reports and management responses.

**Independent evaluations**

**Three independent thematic reports** were conducted in 2018: [*Evaluation of UNDP provision of inter-agency operational services from 2010 to 2017*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9741)*,* [*Evaluation of UNDP inter-agency pooled financing services 2010 to 2017*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9522), and [*Evaluation of UNDP’s support to poverty reduction in the least developed countries (LDC) 2014-2017*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9523)*.* The reports were well-received and provided UNDP with important learning opportunities to further improve its programmatic and operational approaches, tools and decision-making. UNDP has taken note of and is building on the areas where we are doing well, and carefully considered and responded to areas where we need to do more. The management responses are available in the [Evaluation Resource Centre](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/reports/managementresponsesnapshot/ieo) (ERC).

Recognizing the high importance of the poverty in LDCs evaluation and the need for sustained consultation and reflection, UNDP management decided to postpone the submission of a full management response and presented instead an interim management note alongside the evaluation. The intention behind this decision was to develop a strong and comprehensive management response that had benefitted not only from UNDP’s internal review but also inputs from the IEO and member states. The final management response will be presented at the Annual Session 2019.

**Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPE)**

High-quality ICPEs are key building blocks for UNDP’s next generation country programmes. Out of the fourteen ICPEs conducted in 2018, four (Paraguay, Yemen, Angola and Madagascar) had been finalized and uploaded to the ERC as of December 2018. The other ten reports are expected to be finalized and uploaded early 2019[[2]](#footnote-2). Evaluations that are context specific, timely and forward-looking form a critical building block for Country Offices for learning, programming and decision-making.

**Box 1 Select key findings and recommendations from 2018 ICPEs**

The completed 2018 ICPEs found that UNDP has overall solid relationships with Governments and the capacity to respond and adapt to emerging needs, successfully supported countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the SDGs. UNDP has provided effective support to countries in increasing national awareness and institutional capacity on environmental issues, environmental funding, and increasing government awareness on disaster risk reduction. Through support to ministries and women’s networks, UNDP has made important contributions regarding implementing gender policies at national and local levels, improving capacities to collect, analyze and report on gender data, and encouraged greater participation and influence in democratic processes.

In **Angola**, UNDP strategically positioned itself by advising on the country’s graduation process from LDC status. In **Paraguay** UNDP is viewed as a reliable partner for the provision of management support services to the Government, and an impartial and trusted convener and broker for the private sector and civil society organizations. Through the preparation of the **Yemen** Resilience Programme, UNDP has provided the framework and entry point for comprehensive programming on the humanitarian-development nexus. By successfully linking humanitarian and development activities under a unified and coherent resilience programme, UNDP has evolved as an important actor. In **Madagascar**, UNDP has achieved encouraging results, particularly with regard to the electoral process, anti-corruption, access to justice and job creation. In addition, the ICPE for **Bhutan**, completed in December 2017, concluded that UNDP has significantly contributed to the consolidation of Bhutan’s parliamentary democracy, and helped governance institutions and communities exercise the principles of democratic governance at national and local levels, with a focus on inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

UNDP notes recommendations to help strengthen programme effectiveness including on visibility and to better leverage its comparative advantage as a broker and integrator of efforts to support countries to implement the 2030 Agenda. More strategically-focused interventions, realistic long-term visions and clear theories of change are needed to ensure integration among thematic areas and build synergies to ensure more significant, transformative and sustainable results. UNDP also needs to more systematically address the needs of gender, youth and other marginalized groups in programmes, develop and build on strategic partnerships, and progress on mobilizing funds from the private sector, international financial institutions and governments.

UNDP welcomed the **Independent country programme evaluation synthesis** prepared by the IEO, which reflect on findings, conclusions and lessons learned from 105 assessments of development results (ADRs) conducted in 93 countries between 2002 and 2016. Considering the long timespan and wide number of country programmes covered, the findings are very useful and informative. UNDP’s contribution has been espe­cially noteworthy in the areas of governance and poverty reduction, as well as environment and disaster risk reduction through for example through the ver­tical funds, while gender equality and women’s empowerment, long-term sustainability and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices are weaker areas of programmatic work. Findings from the synthesis have been considered in the management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to poverty reduction in the LDCs.

The consultative process through which the [**evaluation guidelines**](http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/index.shtml) were revised by the IEO is appreciated. With the new guidelines, which build on the evaluation chapter of the ‘Yellow Handbook’, and the 2016 Evaluation Policy UNDP is provided with a solid framework for the evaluation function. The increased emphasis on management accountability and the clear management process for decentralized evaluations is particularly welcomed and will be critical for changing the evaluation culture, increasing quality and safeguarding independence. The guidelines, launched in January 2019, will be rolled out by the IEO, BPPS and Regional Bureaus through webinars and regional workshops.

In addition, in relation to the successful **National Evaluation Capacities Conference** held in Istanbul, Turkey in 2017, the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Government of Turkey worked very closely with the IEO. [[3]](#footnote-3)

**Decentralized evaluations**

As of January 31st, 2019, 283 decentralized evaluations had been completed in 2018. Out of these evaluations, 247 were project evaluations, 21 outcome evaluations and 15 were UNDAF, thematic or country programme evaluations. The distribution between the regions can be seen in the graph below.

**Quality of evaluations**

Based on IEO’s annual quality assessment of decentralized evaluations since 2016, the percentage of reports considered moderately satisfactory, satisfactory or highly satisfactory has increased over the three consecutive years - from 72 percent in 2016 to 76 percent in 2018. The percentage of evaluations rated satisfactory also increased by 6 percent (from 19 to 25 percent) compared with 2017. In particular, the Arab States and the Europe and CIS regions have significantly improved the quality of their evaluations (from 47 in 2016 to 65 percent in 2018 for the former, and from 65 to 83 percent in the latter).

\*Number of evaluations quality assessed: 259 (2016), 287 (2017), 225 (2018)

The highest rated report in 2018 was the [*Local climate adaptive living facility evaluation*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9605), by UNCDF. This high-quality evaluation provides a very sound analysis and fair assessment of key strengths and weaknesses and can be used as a best practice example for learning. Other good quality evaluations conducted by Country Offices include: [*Évaluation du Projet « Appui au Processus Électoral en Haïti Mis en œuvre par le PNUD*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9167) (Haiti), [*External Review and Mid-Term Evaluation of the Project "Afghanistan Access to Justice (AA2J)*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9291) (Afghanistan), [*Improving sustainability of PA system in desert ecosystems through promotion of biodiversity-compatible livelihoods in and around PA evaluation*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9973) (Kazakhstan), and the [*Terminal Evaluation of the Strengthening Climate Information and Early Warning Systems project*](https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9489) (Malawi).

UNDP captures aspects of good practice from decentralized and independent evaluations to learn from and to inform decision-making and programming. Examples of good quality evaluations are also referenced in the revised evaluation guidelines. UNDP will undertake a detailed analysis of the QA findings, and strengthen the extraction of evaluation findings and lessons for the whole organization.

To address the fact that around 24 percent of the evaluations conducted are of a quality short of UNDP’s minimum standards, UNDP reaffirms its commitment to further strengthen the Country Office, Regional and Central bureaus evaluation capacities through training on the revised evaluation guidelines and international norms and standards, more analysis and improved quality assurance and follow-up processes.

When reviewing QA data across the period 2016-2018, it is clear that UNDP has improved the quality in three out the four sections highlighted in the graph below.

Areas of strength include developing TORs that outline the focus, detail the timelines and describe the planned approaches. Evaluation reports are often good at addressing the objectives outlined in TORs, draw linkages to national government strategies and plans, and provide concise and logical findings. While the quality in addressing cross-cutting issues has improved (up from 53 to 60 percent) more is needed to ensure that evaluations use gender-responsive methodologies and criteria and evaluation questions that specifically address how gender equality and the empowerment of women has been integrated into the design, planning, implementation of the intervention and the results achieved, draw linkages to the SDGs and include discussion on risks. QA reports for low quality evaluations often also highlight the need to provide more detailed explanations of the projects, as well as the methodological approach and analysis.

**Investment in evaluation**

UNDP’s financial investment in the evaluation function continues to increase. The total 2018 expenditures on evaluation across the organization of $22.08 million indicates an increase of 11 percent compared with 2016 when UNDP spent $19.85 million on evaluation. UNDP’s allocation to the IEO continued to be in line with the 0.2 percent of core and non-core programmatic resources financial commitment.

High-quality evaluations that are successfully undertaken and generate useful insights require an adequate investment of human and financial resources. As allocations for decentralized evaluations are included in programme and project budgets, UNDP does not have a corporate ‘budget line’, which makes it is difficult for the organization to influence the expenditures. Through capacity building and the revised evaluation guidelines, UNDP is stressing to offices the need for strategic, well-resourced evaluations that will provide value for money.

**Evaluation plan implementation**

UNDP acknowledges the high number of changes made to the evaluation plans throughout the year, and particularly during the last quarter of the year. The fact that out of the 504 evaluations planned in July 2018, only 283 (or 56 percent) of evaluations were completed, and that a large number of the conducted decentralized evaluations are mandatory is also noted. There is scope for improving evaluation plan design, implementation and review, as well as strengthening the oversight functions, which is being addressed through the revised evaluation guidelines, capacity building and internal review of processes.

Prioritization and strategic planning are important to ensure that Country Offices develop evaluation plans that are strategic, practical and realistically planned and budgeted according to the realities of the country office’s budget and human resources. In 2018, UNDP had across 120 country offices a total of 146 full time equivalents (FTEs) on M&E, out of which 51.34 (or 35 percent) were dedicated solely to the evaluation function. This represents an increase compared with 2016, when out of 137 FTEs, 38.26 (or 27.9 percent) covered evaluation. The Global Policy Network (GPN), the Decentralized Evaluation Knowledge Network (which currently has 209 members) and the Communities of Practice for the six signature solutions will help bolster a culture of learning and knowledge sharing based on evaluation evidence.

**Status of implementation for management responses to independent and decentralized evaluations**

Over the last five years (2014-18), the IEO conducted 46 independent evaluations including 12 thematic evaluations, 33 ADRs/ICPEs and one other. As of April 2019, 100% of independent (thematic and other) evaluations and 94% of ADRs/ICPEs have a management response. All management responses to thematic evaluations conducted before 2017 have been completely implemented, while 12 of the ADR/ICPE management responses have been completely implemented.

Out of the key actions planned for independent evaluations (thematic and other), 66 percent had been completed, 31 percent were ongoing, two percent had not yet been initiated, zero percent was overdue, and one percent was no longer applicable[[4]](#footnote-4).

For the 29 ADRs/ICPEs available in ERC as of December 31st 2018[[5]](#footnote-5), 57 percent had been completed, 17 percent were ongoing, two percent had not yet been initiated, 23 percent were overdue, and one percent was no longer applicable[[6]](#footnote-6).

During the same timeframe, UNDP had as of December 31st 2018 completed 1,531 decentralized evaluations, out of which 97 percent had a management response. Out of the key actions planned, 66 percent had been completed, 15 percent were ongoing, 5 percent had not yet been initiated, 8 percent were overdue, and 6 percent were no longer applicable[[7]](#footnote-7).

**Conclusion**

There is continued progress in strengthening the evaluation function within UNDP, and the organization reaffirms its commitment to promoting greater accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision-making and organizational learning. Evaluations provide an important source of evidence of what works and what does not in different contexts, which is critical to maintain a strong results-focus and to continuously improve the quality of UNDP support to help countries tackle their development challenges.

UNDP will continue to work closely with the IEO to carry out its important role in supporting organizational results, including rolling out and create awareness of the updated decentralized evaluation guidelines.

**Key results achieved, and lessons learned from a select number of thematic evaluations**

Previously the management commentaries included results reporting for all thematic evaluations conducted within the covered timeframe. However, in line with UNDP’s commitment to be a result and learning oriented organization, going forward the commentaries will instead focus on a few key evaluations to highlight the major results achieved and how lessons learned from the evaluations have helped feed into the organization’s programmatic and operational decision-making. The full set of evaluations conducted by the IEO and UNDP programme units, and their related management responses are available in the [ERC](http://erc.undp.org/index.html;jsessionid=2825BA456DA1408C7BC53F6267CDC59E).

**Evaluation of UNDP Support to Disability-Inclusive Development (2016)**

One billion people have a disability, making them the largest minority in the world. Disability is a multi-dimensional development and human rights issue. Disability inclusion is instrumental to the SDGs and its central pledge to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first. In the 2018-21 SP, UNDP is committed to an inclusive approach to sustainable human development which benefits all. UNDP has a strong and institutional commitment to mainstream human rights including the rights of persons with disabilities in our work, through the human rights-based approach to our development programming. UNDP is also implementing specific programmes in countries around the world to support disability inclusion across our mandate. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in our work is instrumental to the achievement of human development and the SDGs.

To ensure UNDP is making progress against this commitment, the IRRF of the SP incorporated two outcomes, four outputs and one institutional indicator that are disaggregated by persons with disabilities or sensitive to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. In 2018, 48 per cent of the UNDP country programmes approved are designed to measure progress for persons with disabilities, a rapid increase from only seven per cent in 2017, indicating the swift integration of persons with disabilities in the way we work.

2018 concluded action across UNDP on the management response to the independent evaluation of UNDP’s work on disability inclusive development (Jan 2017). The evaluation recognized UNDP’s leading role in supporting disability inclusion at country level and highlighted actions that could be taken to further this support. Concluding this process, it is clear the evaluation prompted many important steps forward for UNDP- building on previous good practice, including how to make UNDP a more inclusive employer.  Importantly, it also facilitated coordinated action across UNDP to further our objective to support disability inclusion. Coordination mechanisms established to maintain momentum on the evaluation follow-up will remain as an important collaboration platform to enhance our knowledge and coordinated support for disability inclusion in UNDP. For example, in 2018 UNDP has with ILO been co-leading a system-wide initiative to finalize a UN Disability Inclusion Strategy for the UN system, with the objective to address existing gaps across the system and support coordinated efforts to create a basis for lasting and transformative change on disability inclusion.

In 2018, UNDP launched a comprehensive Guidance Note on Disability Inclusive Development which incorporates a reflection on UNDP’s comparative advantage and builds on the many good practices globally reflecting the diversity and depth of interventions undertaken by UNDP. This Guidance demonstrates that Inclusive policies and programmes are sound investments in society and seeks to galvanize momentum within the twin frameworks of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is a testimony to the organization’s efforts in supporting disability inclusive development across UNDP’s mandate, both as a means in itself and a catalyst for sustainable human development.

The Government of **Somalia** has progressed the protection of human rights, with support from a new UN Joint Programme on Human Rights. It ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018, and the Government prepared bills approved in Parliament to establish a Human Rights Commission and a Disability Rights Agency.  In **Honduras**, strategic alliances were established with the private sector to enhance their contribution to the 2030 Agenda through corporate social responsibility and the promotion of inclusive business models. One example is the Fab Lab that produces prosthetics for returned migrants with disabilities, featured at the 2018 World Disability Summit.  In **Cambodia**, working with Government and civil society, UNDP helped register 7,731 persons with disabilities (37 per cent female) in the disability allowance scheme, 1,472 (51 per cent female) of whom received the allowance in 2018.

**Joint Assessment of the Institutional Effectiveness of UNDP (2017)**

UNDP promotes and continually undertakes efforts to establish an organizational results culture that uses findings and recommendations from evaluations and audits for strategic decision-making, learning from successes, failure and from innovation. Findings from evaluations such as the 2017 Joint Assessment of the Institutional Effectiveness of UNDP, conducted by the IEO and the OAI, and the 2017 evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan and global and regional programmes have for example provided valuable findings and recommendations for the organization to draw on.

Reflecting on the lessons learned from past practices, including the need to enhance stability and reduce reporting burden on the Country Offices, UNDP undertook a new end-to-end re-write of its programming prescriptive content, which was finalized and launched in 2018. The re-write reduces burden by an average of 33 days per programming staff per year and introduces more innovative ways to work with partners to achieve the SDGs. The development process was co-owned by all Bureaus and supported by a comprehensive regional rollout package. UNDP also developed a new Results Oriented Analysis Report (ROAR), which will support the organization’s results monitoring and reporting for the next four years. The report enables all parts of the organization to learn lessons from success and failures and will help UNDP articulate its comparative and collaborative advantage where it matters most: the country level.

Together with other funds and programmes (UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women) UNDP agreed on a harmonized structure of the IRRF 2018-2021. The new results architecture developed brought the Country Programme Document (CPD) results frameworks to the centre of the IRRF to support results reporting of the CPDS, better analyze results and resources by the SP Outcomes and six Signature Solutions, assess the contribution to the SDGs and UNDP’s commitment to LNOB; generate data for the new UNDAF reporting system and respond to the increasing demand for [transparency](http://open.undp.org/). Building on the success of using ‘markers’ for tracking progress on cross-cutting issues (gender equality and women’s empowerment) and supporting programming during the previous SP period, additional markers (Hows, Whos (LNOB) Marker, Partners Marker, Joint Programme Marker, South-South and Triangular Cooperation Marker and Humanitarian Marker), have also been introduced at the project output level.

These improvements will create the space to continue to shift the focus of RBM from compliance towards a results culture that enables management of UNDP’s work based on performance. Results-based management capacity will be further enhanced through the development of an RBM/programme management certification for staff, which will be rolled out in 2019.

**Evaluation of the contribution of the global and regional human development reports to public policy processes (2015)**

The 2015 evaluation highlighted the need for UNDP to re-launch the idea of human development much more strategically and recommended UNDP to undertake measures to enhance the influence of the global HDRs on public policy processes and revisit the purpose of to strengthen the contribution of regional HRDs and provided the organization with important lessons to draw on.

As part of UNDP’s commitment to the UN Secretary-General’s reform and to strengthen its leadership on cutting-edge thinking and policy advice, UNDP is reinvesting in the human development approach, and reimagining what global, regional, and national human development reports should be in the context of the SDGs agenda. There are new challenges to human development, especially inequality and sustainability, that require concerted measurement and analytical attention. New partnerships growing out of the agreement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and new technologies provide potential new ways of working and communicating key report messages. In this context, UNDP recently reset its thought leadership priorities which include: (i) preparations of new generations of HDRs and Indices taking into consideration of changing development landscape and availability of new data including big data; (ii) revitalizing the network of regional and national HDRs, connecting regional and national reports with the global HDR and finding synergies; and (iii) positioning HDRO (and UNDP) as an exciting hub/centre for research and innovation through strategic partnerships with relevant academic institutions and research labs.

To strengthenits leadership in multidimensional poverty measures, UNDP is investing in applied research, promoting partnerships and catalyzing multi-stakeholder dialogues, including civil society and the private sector. Since 2008, UNDP has been investing in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), which in 2018 led to the development of the joint ‘2018 Global Multidimensional Poverty index’ report. The same year, HDRO also revisited the global MPI and published together with OPHI a joint methodology paper on how to align the MPI with the SDGs. To ensure consistency in reporting on key human development indices and statistics, HDRO also released the ’Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical update’ in 2018.

1. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/executive-board/documents-for-sessions/adv2017-special.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Comoros, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Mali, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Tunisia and Venezuela [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Annual report on evaluation 2018 paragraph 40, page 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These figures are based on ERC data as of Dec 31st 2018. Out of a total 209, 138 had been completed, 4 were not yet initiated, 67 ongoing, 0 overdue and 2 no longer applicable. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The four ICPEs marked as completed 2018, had not yet been uploaded to ERC as of December 31st 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Out of 374 actions planned- 215 had been completed, 6 were not yet initiated, 65 ongoing, 85 overdue and 3 no longer applicable. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Out of the 13,413 actions planned- 8,797 had been completed, 2,014 were ongoing, 682 had not yet been initiated, 1,122 were overdue and 790 no longer applicable. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)