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**Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council**

## United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office

### Report of the Executive Director

#### *Summary*

The present report provides an update on the functioning and work of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office. It was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution [79/226](#), in which the Assembly requested that the Executive Director present the annual report to the Economic and Social Council at its operational activities for development segment.

As set out by the Secretary-General in his report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([A/72/684-E/2018/7](#)), the Office was established with the unique function of assessing system-wide contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Since the appointment of its first Executive Director in September 2023, the Office has made progress on a series of administrative and evaluative matters, including by releasing the United Nations Sustainable Development Group system-wide evaluation policy and a series of evaluations. Despite the successful establishment of the Office, a scarcity of financial resources has hindered its ability to provide evaluations at the pace intended, and there are longer-term concerns about its viability given the limited voluntary resources available.

The present report highlights the value and strategic importance of the work of the Office in meeting the expectations first affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution [64/289](#). It provides information on the system-wide evaluation function and highlights lessons learned from system-wide evaluation activities as well as the main achievements for 2024, including the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group system-wide evaluation policy. It also contains the programme



of work and budget for the Office in 2025, along with resourcing plans and information on country-level evaluations under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

## I. Introduction

1. In his report entitled “Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet” ([A/72/684-E/2018/7](#)), the Secretary-General set out his plan to make the United Nations development system more strategic, accountable, collaborative and responsive to national development needs and priorities, including through the establishment of an independent system-wide evaluation office.

2. The General Assembly, in its resolution [72/279](#), welcomed the strengthening of independent system-wide evaluation measures by the Secretary-General, including measures to improve capacities. Subsequently, in its resolution [76/4](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide Member States with the information needed to fully support and facilitate the establishment and functioning of an independent and well-resourced Evaluation Office. The Secretary-General has provided this information in his regular reports to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.<sup>1</sup>

3. System-wide evaluation constitutes a whole-of-United Nations approach with a focus on collective performance, results and learning. It is the only evaluative function for assessing the combined contributions of entities across the entire United Nations development system to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

4. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office is responsible for the provision of independent evaluation evidence that can be used to strengthen transparency and accountability, and to incentivize joint work and collective learning. The Office is also tasked with conducting system-wide evaluations and highlighting evidence from those evaluations on the contribution of the United Nations development system to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. The present report is the first produced by the Office in accordance with resolution [79/226](#), in which the General Assembly requested that the Executive Director of the Office, beginning in 2025, present the report to the Economic and Social Council at its operational activities for development segment.

6. In his most recent report on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review ([A/79/72-E/2024/12](#)), the Secretary-General noted priorities for 2024, including the finalization of the system-wide evaluation policy and progress with respect to building foundational elements of the Office as a stand-alone independent office tasked with providing leadership and strategic guidance for the system-wide evaluation function in accordance with this policy, following the appointment of the Executive Director in 2023.

7. In 2024, considerable progress was made in consolidating the foundations of the Office to ensure its independence, credibility and effectiveness, in line with the expectations of the Economic and Social Council as expressed in its resolution [2023/31](#). The adoption of the system-wide evaluation policy, in consultation with United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities and United Nations oversight bodies, was a key achievement. The policy is the culmination of much consideration by Member States of the need to better understand the collective contribution of the United Nations development system to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>1</sup> See [A/79/72-E/2024/12](#), [A/78/72-E/2023/59](#) and [A/77/69-E/2022/47](#).

8. In 2024, the Office increased awareness and understanding of its unique function and demonstrated its contribution to system-wide learning, transparency and accountability by publishing two reports: an evaluation and a value-for-money assessment of the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. All evaluations, reports and other products referred to in the present report are available on the website of the Office.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation served to confirm the effectiveness of investing over \$500 million in an inter-agency model and contained recommendations to improve delivery and harmonize business practices to deliver coherent, integrated support and maximize collective results.

9. In response to the request from the General Assembly in its resolution 78/166, the Office led an initiative to bridge the gap between the production of evaluation evidence by United Nations entities, and its strategic use by intergovernmental bodies and United Nations leadership. Collaborating with United Nations evaluation offices, the Office provided user-friendly products to improve the accessibility and use of evaluation evidence for the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review. For instance, it published interactive digital maps of United Nations system evaluation evidence on quadrennial comprehensive policy review mandates and the Sustainable Development Goals, and evidence summaries on priority topics for the review.

10. The Office has commenced two system-wide evaluations, both of which will be completed in 2025. The first evaluation is focused on assessing progress made towards a new generation of United Nations country teams, which are a key element of United Nations development system repositioning (in accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/279), the aim being to ensure that lessons are learned from the implementation of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, which are in use in more than 120 countries. The second evaluation is focused on the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy of 2019 and intended to contribute to accountability and the learning of lessons in relation to disability inclusion across the United Nations system.

11. As set out by Member States and the Secretary-General, the effectiveness and usefulness of the system-wide evaluation function relies on the commitment and engagement of all United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities. Leadership for this unique function is provided by the Office. In 2024, the Office continued to strengthen engagement with key stakeholders, including Member States, United Nations entities and evaluation and oversight bodies, and continued to establish partnerships with key international evaluation and evidence bodies.

12. Adequate, predictable and sustainable resourcing for the Office is a fundamental requirement to ensure its independence, credibility and effectiveness, as re-emphasized by the General Assembly in its resolution 79/226. With a view to securing adequate and predictable funding for the Office, the Secretary-General submitted a proposed programme budget for 2025 in which he set out total requirements of \$3.4 million.

13. The General Assembly, in its resolution 79/257, endorsed the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/79/7), which recommended against the proposed conversion of extrabudgetary resources to regular budget funding in 2025. Consequently, the Office continues to rely on extrabudgetary resources, with a revised budget of \$3.01 million for 2025.

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.un.org/system-wide-evaluation-office](http://www.un.org/system-wide-evaluation-office).

## II. System-wide evaluation policy: guiding system-wide evaluation to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

14. The system-wide evaluation policy was formally adopted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group in November 2024. It was drawn up in response to a desire among Member States to better understand the collective contribution of the United Nations development system, as articulated by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/289, and in accordance with the proposals set out by the Secretary-General in his report on repositioning the United Nations development system (A/72/684-E/2018/7). That report contained recommendations on how to make the system more strategic and accountable, including through the establishment of a system-wide evaluation office.

15. The system-wide evaluation policy contains a description of the framework, guiding principles and procedures for system-wide evaluation, as well as details of roles, responsibilities and reporting arrangements to ensure the effective planning and conduct of, and follow-up to, evaluations. The key users of system-wide evaluation evidence, and mechanisms for maximizing the use of such evidence, are defined. As confirmed in the policy and in accordance with the provisions set out therein, two types of system-wide evaluation are used within the United Nations development system, namely United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations and global system-wide evaluations, under the overall leadership and guidance of the Office. The policy also contains a definition of resources and risks, as well as details as to how the policy is to be implemented and reviewed.

16. The system-wide evaluation policy was drafted in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation<sup>3</sup> of the United Nations Evaluation Group, and additional principles of complementarity, subsidiarity and collaboration that are particularly important for system-wide evaluations. It is anticipated that the policy framework will evolve over time to reflect guidance from Member States in the form of resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and subsequent General Assembly resolutions relating to the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.

### Priorities for policy implementation

17. In 2024, considerable progress was made in consolidating the foundations of the Office to ensure its independence, credibility and effectiveness, in line with the provisions of the system-wide evaluation policy. Those efforts included designing operational systems for the planning and conduct of evaluations, and for following up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations; clarifying the institutional arrangements for system-wide evaluations; and engaging with United Nations evaluation and oversight bodies.

18. Further priorities for policy implementation in 2025 include: preparing the first multi-year global system-wide evaluation plan; consolidating quality assurance and assessment and management response and follow-up systems; and introducing mechanisms to enhance coordination and oversight of system-wide evaluation.

### *Global system-wide evaluation plan*

19. The intention is for the Office to conduct a small number of evaluations on the most strategic and relevant issues related to the United Nations development system as a whole. The Office independently determines a multi-year programme of work,

<sup>3</sup> Available at [www.unevaluation.org/uneval\\_publications/uneval-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system](http://www.unevaluation.org/uneval_publications/uneval-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system).

following an open and transparent consultative process with Member States and United Nations entities on the topics and timings of the proposed evaluations. Given the limited availability of voluntary funding, however, the topics and timing of evaluations have to date been reliant on the availability of funds and the priorities of funders.

20. The Office is preparing a four-year global system-wide evaluation plan aligned with the priorities set out by the General Assembly in its resolution [79/226](#). The plan will contain a description of the purpose, scope and resources of global system-wide evaluations and related activities. It will be based on the criteria set out in the system-wide evaluation policy and will balance the need for consultation and transparency with the prerogative of the Office to exercise independence in selecting evaluations. In preparing the plan, the System-wide Evaluation Office is consulting with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors, in line with the mechanisms used to promote cooperation among those entities.

21. Potential evaluations are identified through a systematic approach that draws on independent analyses, the mapping of available evaluation evidence and the work of United Nations evaluation and oversight bodies, including OIOS and the Joint Inspection Unit.

#### *Quality assurance and assessment mechanisms*

22. The credibility and use of system-wide evaluations is underpinned by robust quality assurance processes. The Office is consolidating guidance and quality assurance mechanisms for system-wide evaluations in order to maintain adherence to evaluation policy principles, norms and standards and the norms and standards for evaluation, building on the procedures for commissioning, management, quality assurance and reporting implemented by the Office.

23. The system-wide evaluation policy specifies that independent external assessors are to evaluate the quality of all completed system-wide evaluations, including those conducted under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Results should be made publicly available alongside the evaluation reports and reported annually by the Office. In 2025, the Office will set requirements for the establishment of independent quality assessment for all completed system-wide evaluations. Progress in that regard, however, will depend on the availability of adequate and predictable resources.

#### *Management response and follow-up database*

24. There must be robust and transparent mechanisms in place for the preparation of timely management responses to evaluation recommendations. All system-wide evaluations require a formal management response in which follow-up actions are recorded and implementation tracked so as to ensure meaningful impact.

25. Under the system-wide evaluation policy, it is envisaged that the Development Coordination Office, as the secretariat of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System, will work with United Nations entities to facilitate reporting on the implementation of management responses through existing mechanisms and that progress on the status of implementation of evaluation recommendations will be reported annually by the Executive Director of the System-wide Evaluation Office.

26. A database will be required for follow-up purposes; it is envisaged that it will be developed in 2025, subject to the availability of resources.

*Mechanisms to enhance coordination, collaboration and oversight with respect to system-wide evaluations*

27. Given the shared nature of the system-wide evaluation function, the system-wide evaluation policy sets out mechanisms for coordination between the Office and evaluation and oversight bodies, including through the establishment of two dedicated mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of system-wide evaluations in 2025: (a) the System-wide Evaluation Steering Group, which consists of the heads of individual entities' evaluation offices and provides advice, inputs and resources in relation to the design, conduct, dissemination and use of system-wide evaluation products; and (b) an independent evaluation advisory panel, which will consist of experts in evaluation and development, and provide substantive strategic advice on the implementation of the policy.

### III. Programme of work in 2024

28. The delivery of timely system-wide evaluation reports with relevant and targeted recommendations is intended to improve performance, collaboration and alignment of United Nations development system entities by strengthening accountability for development system results and incorporating lessons learned. The implementation status of the evaluation activities planned for 2024 are set out in table 1.

Table 1

**Status of implementation of evaluation activities, 2024**

<i>No.</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned completion</i>	<i>Management response issued</i>	<i>Status of implementation of recommendations</i>
1	Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls	Completed		Yes	Ongoing
2	Value-for-money assessment of the Spotlight Initiative	Completed		n/a	
3	Enhancing the use of United Nations evaluation evidence in support of the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive priority review – evaluation summaries	Completed		n/a	
4	Enhancing the use of United Nations evaluation evidence in support of the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive priority review – interactive evidence maps	Completed		n/a	
5	System-wide evaluation of progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams	Ongoing	2025		
6	System-wide evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy	Ongoing	2025		

## **A. Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative**

29. The Spotlight Initiative, which represents an investment of more than \$500 million, leveraged expertise within the United Nations to address both the drivers and consequences of violence against women and girls through 26 country programmes, five regional programmes, one thematic regional programme and two civil society programmes. The evaluation of the Initiative assessed its overall performance and contribution to United Nations development system reform and informed the design and implementation of Spotlight Initiative 2.0.

30. The findings of the evaluation are presented under seven main areas of investigation: programme design; management and operationalization; governance, leadership and coherence; results and progress; United Nations reform and new ways of working; sustainability; and lessons learned.

31. Overall, the evaluation found proof of concept for the Spotlight Initiative model while also highlighting areas for improvement. The comprehensive design demonstrated the ability of an integrated, inter-agency approach to ending violence against women and girls to contribute to higher-order changes at the regional, national and local levels. The Initiative responded to contextual changes to deliver important results across pillars, while deepening stakeholders' understanding of the need for a broad range of actors to work collaboratively. The Initiative's governance model had expanded stakeholder engagement, with civil society playing an important role. While noting these achievements, the evaluation found that programme delivery was significantly challenged by a complicated operational model and by limitations in the compatibility of United Nations administrative and financial systems, which restricted their capacity to function collaboratively. While there are signs that some elements and activities of the Initiative will be continued, the sustainability of the overarching approach is still to be determined.

32. The evaluation made eight recommendations: (a) maintain the key strengths of the Spotlight Initiative design, including its comprehensive approach, while allowing for greater flexibility and adaptability and simplifying its results framework; (b) respond to changing contexts with swiftness and agility to maintain consistent and relevant support for ending violence against women and girls, particularly in crisis and emergency contexts; (c) improve the operational model, including funding modalities and human resources planning; (d) simplify systems for monitoring, learning and dissemination of knowledge; (e) extend civil society stakeholder engagement; (f) develop a holistic funding strategy; (g) ensure that lessons learned inform efforts to accelerate United Nations development system reform and maximize collective results on ending violence against women and girls; (h) embed the comprehensive approach of the Spotlight Initiative into the implementation of United Nations system-wide actions, plans and processes.

33. In the management response to the evaluation, all eight recommendations were accepted and management outlined key actions to be taken for the design and operationalization of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 and the integration of learning into United Nations development system reform efforts and into system-wide gender frameworks and processes.



## **B. Value-for-money assessment of the Spotlight Initiative**

34. In parallel to the evaluation, the System-wide Evaluation Office conducted a value-for-money assessment to respond to observations made by the European Court of Auditors and provide inputs on the evaluation. An interdisciplinary approach combining evaluation theory and economic analysis was used in the assessment.

35. In the assessment, 20 indicators were rated under the four criteria of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. A total of 12 indicators were rated as good and 7 were rated as adequate. For one of the indicators, there was insufficient evidence to make a judgment. None of the indicators were assessed as poor.

36. The overall rating of value for money was good.<sup>4</sup> Economy, efficiency and effectiveness were rated as good, while equity was rated as adequate. The Spotlight Initiative generally met reasonable expectations and targets, with acceptable progress overall. Improvements are needed in costing guidance, coordination and performance monitoring, and to address equity concerns related to geographical coverage and marginalized groups.

## **C. Enhancing the use of United Nations evaluation evidence in support of the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review**

37. The Office plays an important role in strengthening the use of and opportunities to learn from United Nations evaluation evidence by preparing accessible and user-friendly knowledge products and dissemination tools, including evidence syntheses, summaries and evidence maps.

38. Approximately 1,000 evaluation reports are published annually across the United Nations system, providing an extensive but fragmented evidence base. In response to the request from the General Assembly in its resolution 78/166 for the Secretary-General to provide status reporting, including through briefing notes, informal briefings, and case studies with emphasis on development results, on the implementation of all provisions and mandates contained in General Assembly resolution 75/233, the Office led an initiative<sup>5</sup> to pilot the use of artificial intelligence in making this evidence base more accessible to stakeholders involved in the 2024 quadrennial comprehensive policy review. With the use of artificial intelligence tools, evaluation evidence from 940 evaluations conducted by 42 United Nations evaluation functions was classified across the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>6</sup> and also against 24 priority areas set out in General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the 2020 quadrennial

<sup>4</sup> Four standards define levels of performance in terms of expectations, targets and progress: excellent, good, adequate and poor.

<sup>5</sup> Supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office, "United Nations evaluation evidence map: coverage of Sustainable Development Goals", available at [https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/UNSWE\\_Interactive%20Evaluation%20Evidence%20Map\\_SDGs\\_v1.0.html](https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/UNSWE_Interactive%20Evaluation%20Evidence%20Map_SDGs_v1.0.html).

comprehensive policy review.<sup>7</sup> An interactive geographic map of United Nations evaluation coverage was being finalized at the time of writing.

39. The initiative has served as a strong proof of concept for a collaboration between human and artificial intelligence that has the potential to accelerate the production of evidence summaries that correspond to the specific interests of decision makers and complement formal reporting on the United Nations development system.

40. Through the initiative, the Office identified gaps in evaluation evidence on key priorities under the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, such as results-based management, development financing, coordination, coherence, human resources, business operations and funding quality, thereby enabling the Office to make recommendations to increase the relevance of evaluations conducted by United Nations entities on system-wide issues.

41. A key output of the initiative was the production of evaluation evidence summaries on five priority topics for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, which draw on the extensive evidence generated by independent evaluations conducted across the United Nations system. Each summary is based on a system-wide sample of between 25 and 50 evaluations and includes key insights related to the United Nations development system. The findings of the five summaries are outlined below:

(a) **A visible shift: the independent resident coordinator.** Since 2019, the reinvigorated resident coordinator system has contributed to improvements in the coherence of United Nations country team analysis, planning and information-sharing. Resident coordinators have facilitated the delivery of integrated policy advice to governments, convening entities to engage in innovative joint programmes and enabling smaller and non-resident entities on engaging more fully in the work of United Nations country teams. However, despite this progress, the fully coordinated delivery of operational activities has not been achieved. Persisting challenges include the perceived increase in reporting burdens, capacity and resourcing gaps and the unclear depiction of roles and responsibilities and accountabilities in the management and accountability framework;

(b) **United Nations development system reform at the regional level.** Changes at the regional level have been slower. The regional collaborative platforms are not fully meeting expectations in relation to enhancing United Nations system collaboration or deploying regional-level assets to better support countries. The Development Coordination Office has supported resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, but its broader role in the regional collaborative platforms and issue-based coalitions was not well understood. The regional commissions are increasingly integrated within the wider United Nations development system, but face challenges in fully collaborating with the resident coordinator system and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework cycles;

(c) **Unlocking quality funding.** Flexible, core and pooled funding resulted in more strategic and innovative United Nations development cooperation that was responsive to national priorities and changing circumstances and also to increased inter-agency collaboration. In contrast, tightly earmarked funding had the opposite effect. There is a growing disconnect between donor advocacy for quality funding and actions to deliver such funding. The need for strategic, innovative, joint and

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-wide Evaluation Office, “United Nations evaluation evidence map: detailed evidence on 2020 priorities of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review”, available at [https://www.sdg-synthesis-coalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/UNSWE\\_Interactive%20Evaluation%20Evidence%20Map\\_QCPR\\_detailed%20evidence\\_V1.0.html](https://www.sdg-synthesis-coalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/UNSWE_Interactive%20Evaluation%20Evidence%20Map_QCPR_detailed%20evidence_V1.0.html).

multipronged resource mobilization strategies supported by senior leadership was clear;

(d) **Building a whole-of-system response to complex settings.** Country-level leadership capacities are often the most critical factor for promoting collaboration and coherence across different United Nations actions. Areas where there are gaps in institutional capacities include conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity in humanitarian and development programming and risk-informed analytical approaches. Good practices such as inclusive targeting, participatory project design and development and peacebuilding approaches that address gender inequality and promote social inclusion are applied inconsistently. Links between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work have been impeded both by siloed and short-term donor funding instruments, as well as by internal United Nations entity siloes;

(e) **Towards sustainable food systems.** Four fundamental elements for interventions in food systems are: (i) strategic, system-based and context-adapted approaches; (ii) engagement with legislation and regulation; (iii) a focus on nutrition and health; and (iv) attention to human rights, gender and diversity. Successful food system transformation relies on strengthening resilience in agricultural communities, data availability and analysis and technological innovation. However, sustainable financing for food systems has been scarce and potential multiplier effects from United Nations entity collaboration on food system interventions have not been capitalized on.

42. Further details on how these products were used to support Member States' deliberations on the new quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle are provided in section IV.

## **D. System-wide evaluation on progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams**

43. At the request of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the Office launched an evaluation of progress made towards a new generation of United Nations country teams in mid-2024. The goal of the evaluation was to explore good practices and opportunities for improvement on country programme derivation from and alignment with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and in the United Nations country team configuration. The evaluation is strategic and forward-facing, covering all United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities and the resident coordinator system at the global, regional and country levels from 2019 to 2025, and its aim is to learn lessons from the first generation of Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, which are now being implemented in more than 120 countries. The final evaluation report will be published in July 2025.

44. The preliminary findings of the evaluation indicate that the vision set out in General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) for a new generation of United Nations country teams remains highly relevant. Since 2018, the repositioning of the United Nations development system has resulted in many important improvements, notably more coherent analysis and planning, and widespread appreciation for the reinvigorated resident coordinator system.

45. The ambition of the repositioning of the United Nations development system was, first, to establish a revitalized, strategic, flexible and results- and action-oriented United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework as the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations

development activities in each country<sup>8</sup> and, second, to ensure that United Nations country teams deliver shared results in response to the priorities set out in the Cooperation Frameworks. However, a significant gap between operational realities and the strategic intent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks was clear in the evaluation's preliminary findings on the practice of country programme derivation from the Frameworks, United Nations country team configuration exercises and the guidance, tools and support systems developed and used to support the implementation of the Frameworks. According to the evaluation, the Frameworks have not yet become the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country. Similarly, United Nations country teams have not yet significantly reconfigured in line with Cooperation Framework priorities. The system-wide scope of the evaluation allowed for the provision of a holistic analysis of the internal and external factors that have supported or hindered progress in these areas of the development system repositioning. That analysis indicates that changes to incentives and accountabilities are necessary to bridge the gap between ambition and reality.

46. The Office is working to develop feasible and actionable recommendations in order to support United Nations Sustainable Development Group decision-making. Areas of recommendations may include the revision of Cooperation Framework guidance and the management and accountability framework. The evaluation contains evidence to support broader Member State deliberations on reform of the development system.

## **E. System-wide evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy**

47. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, launched in 2019, aims to strengthen disability inclusion across programmes and operations and enable the United Nations system to better support Member States in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

48. The evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, the first system-wide evaluation of disability inclusion in the United Nations system, was launched in 2024 for completion in mid-2025. The evaluation, which is global in scope, will cover the implementation of the Strategy from 2019 to 2025 with a view to contributing to accountability and learning on disability inclusion in the United Nations and informing future processes and events in this area.

## **IV. Use of system-wide evaluation evidence: strengthening learning to accelerate progress across the Sustainable Development Goals**

49. The System-wide Evaluation Office seeks to strengthen learning and accountability in order to contribute to the acceleration of progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, by focusing on key issues and activities that cannot be adequately addressed through existing accountability mechanisms or evaluation functions.

50. A crucial consideration in using the evidence from system-wide evaluation to improve programme delivery is ensuring that system-wide evaluations meet potential

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<sup>8</sup> As envisaged in General Assembly resolutions [72/279](#) and [75/233](#).

user needs from the outset, which can be achieved through consultative planning and management processes and the timely delivery of evaluation reports that contain relevant and targeted recommendations. The evaluation process engages United Nations users in inter-agency reference groups. Evaluations are supported by management groups of United Nations system entity evaluation offices. While the Office maintains its independence, users and stakeholders are consulted in the scoping and design of evaluations, provided with early briefings on emerging results and are also consulted during the development of recommendations, with a view to proposing solutions that are more practical, implementable and owned by the relevant entity. Broad system-wide engagement and consultation adds complexity and requires time and resources but is an essential part of strengthening learning and accountability for collective development results and development system reform.

## A. Management response and follow-up

51. Effective management response and follow-up mechanisms help to ensure that entities implement evaluation recommendations. In 2024, the Development Coordination Office (as secretariat of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group) facilitated the preparation of the management response to the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, which is published along with the evaluation report on the websites of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the Spotlight Initiative.

52. Both of the evaluations completed in 2022, one regarding the United Nations development system response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and another regarding the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, set out forward-looking recommendations on strengthening aspects of the United Nations development system. The management responses were published on the website of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, alongside the evaluation reports.

53. The Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund<sup>9</sup> reported that all eight recommendations made as a result of the evaluation had been implemented by February 2024 and highlighted the key changes implemented in response to the evaluation:

(a) Governance: the Fund's Operational Steering Committee was restructured to reflect more inclusive membership; at the country level, the role of resident coordinators in programme governance and operations was reinforced;

(b) Strategy: the Fund's strategy for 2023–2026 refined its value proposition, positioning the Fund as the global flagship of the United Nations driving transformative pathways to maximize impact across the Goals;<sup>10</sup>

(c) Operations: the Fund moved to a more flexible rolling approach coupled with capacity support to enable the design of high-quality joint programmes (with support from technical lead entities);

(d) Partnerships and collaboration: the Fund reported efforts to strengthen synergies and collaboration with other global vertical funds (United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub, Local2030 Coalition).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, *Trailblazing Change: Accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals through Action – Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund Annual Report 2023* (2024).

<sup>10</sup> [A/79/72-E/2024/12](#).

## **B. Maximizing use**

54. A key area of focus in 2024 was to build understanding of the system-wide evaluation function, the mandate of the Office and its ways of working, as well as to ensure that system-wide evaluation evidence was accessible on key platforms. Those efforts included strengthening engagement across the United Nations, with Member States and other partners.

55. Four briefings were provided to Member States on the system-wide evaluation policy and the work of the Office. As mentioned above, the Office also contributed to the 2024 operational activities for development segment of the Economic and Social Council, with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), on evaluation evidence related to the United Nations development system reform.

56. The Office provided synthesized evidence from United Nations evaluations on priority topics in order to support Member States in their deliberations on a new quadrennial comprehensive policy review (see resolution [79/226](#)). In collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Development Coordination Office, the System-wide Evaluation Office contributed to briefings on the United Nations development system reforms and system-wide evaluation evidence, thereby assisting Member States in formulating guidance for the next four year-cycle. The Office also participated in the training series for Member States organized by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in 2024.

57. A key priority is ensuring the use of system-wide evaluation evidence by United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities, to which end the Office provided briefings to the principals and to entity focal points. Communication and engagement with the resident coordinator system and United Nations country teams was facilitated by the Development Coordination Office.

## **C. Partnerships**

58. The Office regularly communicated with the Joint Inspection Unit and OIOS regarding ongoing work and future plans. The Office is a member of the evaluation reference group for the OIOS evaluation of the resident coordinator system (January to December 2025), and OIOS is part of the evaluation management group for the evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

59. The Office actively contributes to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group by developing technical guidance, strengthening evaluation capacity, coordinating system-wide evaluation activities and promoting the use of system-wide evidence. In 2024, the Office facilitated sessions on the system-wide evaluation function at the evaluation practice exchange during the annual general meeting of the Evaluation Group. The Office played an active role in the evaluation synthesis working group of the Evaluation Group and contributed to redesigning the website of the Group, notably by providing insights from the artificial intelligence-assisted evidence-mapping initiative to improve the accessibility and increase the use of the evaluation database.

60. The Office collaborated with the Global Sustainable Development Goals Synthesis Coalition, co-chaired by the evaluation offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in order to enhance the Coalition's work by synthesizing existing evaluative evidence and making it more accessible so as to accelerate the achievement of the Goals.

61. The Office, in collaboration with Malawi, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Coalition, led a side event for the Summit of the Future

Action Days on using evidence, science and digital technologies to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda. The event announced major new investments in artificial intelligence-supported synthesis of evidence to improve how evidence is produced and used to address economic and societal challenges.

62. In order to promote broader cooperation and disseminate learning from system-wide evaluation activities, the Office expanded its global partnerships, including with the United Nations System Staff College, the secretariat of the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, the Evaluation Network of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, Nordic Evaluation Group, and multilateral and regional development banks.

63. The Office launched web pages on the Secretariat's Intranet (iSeek) and the United Nations Evaluation Group website and began work on a web content to be hosted on the main website of the United Nations ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)). The full repository of evaluation reports is available on the websites of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the United Nations Evaluation Group. The Office also contributed to OIOS evaluation newsletters and the Sustainable Development Goals Digest of the Islamic Development Bank.

## **V. Resourcing of the System-wide Evaluation Office**

64. The General Assembly, in its resolution [79/226](#), re-emphasized the importance of independence, credibility and effectiveness for the functioning of the Office. The Secretary-General has also emphasized that stable funding through regular resources for the Office would be crucial to upholding its independence, transparency and key function in supporting learning and improvement in the United Nations development system (see [A/79/72-E/2024/12](#)). Adequate and predictable funding is a fundamental requirement in this regard and is crucial for ensuring efficiency and effectiveness, in particular for the recruitment and retention of staff with specialized skills and experience.

### **A. Financial resources**

65. The estimated total budget requirement for 2024 was \$2.4 million.

66. In 2024, a total of \$1.54 million was received in extrabudgetary contributions through the trust fund established by the Secretary-General. The Office also received in-kind contributions of \$80,562 to support the implementation of specific activities. Table 2 provides a breakdown of extrabudgetary and in-kind resources received since 2023 from donors and United Nations entities.

67. Contributions from Denmark and Switzerland provided start-up funding for the work of the Office. Contributions from United Nations entities were tightly earmarked to specific evaluation activities, which constrained operational flexibility. In addition, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) seconded a Senior Evaluation Officer (P-5), under a non-reimbursable loan arrangement.



Table 2  
**Extrabudgetary contributions, 2023 and 2024**

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Donor/entity</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>2024 in-kind</i>
Denmark	218.8		
Switzerland	313.0	226.0	
Development Coordination Office		200.0	
Executive Office of the Secretary-General		499.9	
International Fund for Agricultural Development			60.6
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees			20.0
Spotlight Initiative		360.0	
United Nations Children's Fund		100.0	
United Nations Development Programme	20.0	50.0	
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization		2.1	
World Food Programme	20.0	100.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>571.8</b>	<b>1 538.0</b>	<b>80.6</b>

68. In accordance with the financial plan, commitments and expenditures were made against the contributions received up to the end of 2024 in order to fund staff positions of the Office and related operating expenses, in addition to travel. Table 3 provides details the Office's expenditures in 2023 and 2024. All funds were committed and disbursed within their individual grant validity dates.

Table 3  
**Expenditures 2023 and 2024**

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Object of expenditure</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>
Posts	352.6	546.2
Consultants	0	638.2
Travel of staff	13.4	14.9
Contractual services	1.2	5.0
General operating expenses	13.8	19.8
Furniture and equipment	1.8	2.9
Other	49.8	66.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>432.6</b>	<b>1 293.3</b>

69. In addition, resources were made available from the Spotlight Initiative for the conduct of two related evaluation activities, as follows: \$107,826 for the evaluability assessment of the Spotlight Initiative (completed in 2023) and \$767,716 for the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative (completed in 2024).



## **B. Human resources**

70. In line with the vision presented by the Secretary-General in his report on development system reforms (A/72/684-E/2018/7), the Office is staffed by a small team, led by the Executive Director. In 2024, three posts were established: Senior Evaluation Adviser (P-5), Evaluation Officer (P-3) and Senior Administrative Assistant (General Service). All three posts are currently encumbered, including two supported by temporary secondments from UNFPA and WFP. A Junior Professional Officer will be assigned to the Office in the course of 2025.

71. The staff of the Office primarily work to manage system-wide evaluations, which are undertaken by teams of independent experts hired for specific assignments because the variety, complexity and specialized nature of different system-wide evaluation subjects requires the Office to contract independent evaluation and subject matter specialists and experts to conduct the evaluations. That model ensures that the Office remains small, agile and responsive to emerging needs. It is widely used across United Nations evaluation functions.

72. In November 2024, the Office and the Evaluation and Oversight Section of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs initiated a joint procurement process to establish long-term agreements for specialist evaluation services. By leveraging shared networks of specialized evaluation service suppliers through a joint solicitation process, the Offices aligned requirements and streamlined processes to foster a more efficient and effective approach to resourcing evaluation services.

## **VI. Programme of work and financial requirements for 2025**

73. The programme of work for 2025 is set out in table 4 and includes the publication of two system-wide evaluations, the commencement of two new system-wide evaluations, together with the piloting of follow-up reviews to assess the impact of evaluations completed in 2022.

74. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group recommended that the Office consider options for an initial evaluation, ideally in 2025, to assess how the United Nations development system is supporting transformative pathways in order to maximize impact across the Goals, including with regard to: food systems; energy transitions and access; digital connectivity; education and skills gaps; decent jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The aim of the evaluation is to inform future system-wide evaluations that will be focused on specific achievements in relation to the acceleration of progress towards the Goals.

75. The Office plans to launch an evaluation of United Nations work on youth, at the suggestion of the United Nations Youth Office. It will provide accountability and opportunities for learning related to work in the areas of sustainable development, human rights, and peace and security, which will inform the implementation of Youth2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth.

Table 4  
**Status of implementation of evaluation activities for 2025**

<i>No.</i>	<i>Title/description</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned completion</i>
1	System-wide evaluation of progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams	Ongoing	2025
2	System-wide evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy	Ongoing	2025
3	System-wide evaluation: United Nations work on youth	Planned	2026
4	Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group support for transformative pathways to maximize impact across the Goals	Planned	2026
5	Evidence maps and summaries	Planned	2026
6	Follow-up review of the evaluation of the United Nations development system's socioeconomic response to COVID-19	Planned	2026
7	Follow-up review of the evaluation of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund	Planned	2026

76. A key priority for the Office is the further development of foundational guidance and systems in line with the provisions of the system-wide evaluation policy adopted in November 2024, as outlined in section II of the present report.

77. The commencement of all planned activities is subject to the availability of resources. With a view to securing stable funding for the Office in 2025, the Secretary-General submitted a proposed programme budget setting out total requirements of \$3.4 million, comprising \$2.7 million from the programme budget (for the conversion of post and non-post resources) and \$0.7 million in extrabudgetary resources.

78. The General Assembly, in its resolution [79/257](#), endorsed the report of the Advisory Committee of Administrative and Budgetary Questions ([A/79/7](#)), in which the Advisory Committee had recommended against the proposed conversion of extrabudgetary resources to regular budget funding in 2025, noting scarcity of extrabudgetary resources and that further explanation was needed on the complementarity of the Office with United Nations oversight bodies and evaluation offices.

79. In the light of that decision, the Office continues to rely on extrabudgetary resources and is seeking to build upon the significant progress made in 2024 to broaden the funding base for its work, through engagement with Member States and United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities.

80. The Office has further revised its budget for 2025 from \$3.04 million to \$3.01 million; the total comprises \$1.22 million for post resources and \$1.79 million for non-post resources.

## VII. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations

81. At the country level, mandatory evaluations of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework assess the contribution of United Nations country teams to national development results and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, informing the design of subsequent Cooperation Framework cycles. These evaluations ensure accountability and support learning.

82. The evaluations are conducted in accordance with the guidelines for Cooperation Framework evaluations developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Development Coordination Office in 2021. The Development Cooperation Office facilitates and supports the conduct of independent, timely and useful Cooperation Framework evaluations.

83. In line with the system-wide evaluation policy, the Office will advise the Development Coordination Office on models and guidance for the system-wide evaluation function at the country and regional levels, including on the design and operationalization of evaluation quality assurance systems, in order to support credible Cooperation Framework evaluations.

### A. Planning and implementation

84. Cooperation Framework evaluations are commissioned and managed by each Resident Coordinator with the relevant United Nations country team in the penultimate year of the cycle (typically the fourth year of a five-year cycle). The Development Coordination Office provides a global platform for the public dissemination of these evaluations and management responses.

85. The first cohort of Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks reached the penultimate year of their cycle in 2023. Table 5 indicates the status of the planned evaluations for 2023 and 2024 in applicable countries and areas.

Table 5  
Status of cooperation framework evaluations scheduled for 2023 and 2024

Region	2023		2024		
	Completed	Cancelled	Completed	Ongoing	Cancelled/ postponed
Africa	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Namibia	Côte d'Ivoire	Eswatini	Ghana
			Ethiopia	Liberia	Sudan
	Djibouti			Somalia	
	Mali			South Africa	
	Rwanda			Tunisia	
	Sierra Leone			Uganda	
Arab States	Iraq	Bahrain			Syrian Arab Republic
					State of Palestine

Region	2023		2024		
	Completed	Cancelled	Completed	Ongoing	Cancelled/ postponed
Asia-Pacific			Indonesia	China	
			Malaysia		
			Timor-Leste		
Europe and Central Asia			Azerbaijan	Armenia	
			Bosnia and Herzegovina	Belarus	
			Kazakhstan	Georgia	
			North Macedonia	Türkiye	
			Serbia		
			Turkmenistan		
			Uzbekistan		
			Kosovo <sup>a</sup>		
Latin America and the Caribbean	Cuba		Argentina	Guatemala	
	Paraguay		Panama	Mexico	
				Uruguay	

Source: United Nations country team reporting in UN-Info and evaluation status tracking by the Development Coordination Office, as at 24 March 2025.

<sup>a</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#).

86. In 2023, 10 evaluations were planned, 8 of which were completed. In 2024, 33 evaluations were planned, of which 15 were completed, 14 are ongoing (with 7 in the final reporting phase), and 4 were cancelled or postponed.

87. Reasons for cancelling or postponing Cooperation Framework evaluations include insecurity, ongoing crises or changes in the duration of a cycle. Two evaluations in 2023 were not conducted owing to budget constraints, one country team (Syrian Arab Republic) opted for a rapid assessment instead of a fully-fledged evaluation. Some United Nations country teams opted for reviews or rapid assessment instead, which are not considered as evaluations in the data and are not reflected in table 5.

88. In 2025, 32 United Nations country teams will reach the penultimate year of a Cooperation Framework cycle. Of that total, 26 evaluations are planned for completion by the end of the year, while 6 have been cancelled or postponed for the reasons set out above.

## B. Management response

89. Resident coordinators, in collaboration with United Nations country teams, are responsible for preparing the management response to the Cooperation Framework evaluations and taking any follow-up action. Management responses are uploaded to UN-Info as one of the key documents in the road map for the development of a new Cooperation Framework.

90. Of the eight resident coordinators and United Nations country teams that completed Cooperation Framework evaluations scheduled for 2023, six have uploaded a management response in UN-Info.<sup>11</sup> Of the 15 country teams that had completed a 2024 Cooperation Framework evaluation by March 2025, six have uploaded a management response in UN-Info.<sup>12</sup>

### C. Quality and use

91. At the time of reporting, the quality and use of Cooperation Framework evaluations is not optimal due to limited financial resources and their broad scope and complexity. There is limited evidence that such evaluations inform the design of subsequent frameworks, mainly due to issues with their timeliness and quality and the level of ownership of the evaluation process and recommendations by the Resident Coordinator and United Nations country team. Although management responses are usually produced, they are not always publicly available, and accountability for acting on recommendations is weak.

92. The system-wide evaluation policy clarifies the roles and responsibilities in relation to Cooperation Framework evaluations with the aim of contributing to improvements in their quality and use. Suggested improvements include conducting an independent external quality assessment once the evaluation report is finalized (post hoc), to be managed by the System-wide Evaluation Office (subject to the availability of resources), with the results reported on an annual basis.

## VIII. Conclusion

93. 2024 marks the first full year of operations for the System-wide Evaluation Office and demonstrated the added value of this unique function in assessing the contribution of the entire United Nations development system to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Office has advanced on a series of administrative and evaluative matters, including by releasing the system-wide evaluation policy and a series of evaluations on topics that are critical to the quadrennial comprehensive policy review. Significant progress has been made in consolidating foundational elements of the Office as a stand-alone independent office that provides leadership and strategic guidance for the system-wide evaluation function in accordance with the policy.

94. In 2025, the Office will complete two system-wide evaluations and launch two new evaluations, which clearly demonstrates the demand for its contributions to strengthened accountability and learning and to the improvement of the collective contribution of the United Nations development system to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

95. The present report highlights the value and strategic importance of the work of the Office and underlines the critical need for stable and predictable resources in meeting the expectations of Member States, as first affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution [64/289](#). Despite initial success, the scarcity of financial resources has hindered the ability of the Office to provide evaluations at the pace intended and presents longer-term concerns about the viability of the Office given the limited availability of voluntary resources.

<sup>11</sup> Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Mali, Paraguay, Rwanda.

<sup>12</sup> Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Panama, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan.