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**Evaluation**

**Management response to the independent review of the  
UNDP evaluation policy**

**Contents**

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Context and background	2
II. Findings, conclusions and recommendations	2
Annex. Key recommendations and management response	4



## I. Context and background

1. As the custodian of the UNDP evaluation policy, the Executive Board mandated the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP to facilitate an independent review of the revised evaluation policy ([DP/2019/29](#)) that the Executive Board endorsed in its [decision 2019/19](#). An independent team of evaluators carried out the review of the current evaluation policy from August to November 2024.
2. This is the fourth independent review of the UNDP evaluation policy to be presented to the Executive Board. The first review ([DP/2010/20](#)), conducted in 2010, focused particularly on the structure and role of the IEO. The second review ([DP/2015/5](#)), conducted in 2014, focused on improvements to the policy to meet the required standards of independence, credibility and relevance of evaluation outcomes. The reviews included (a) operational independence of IEO; (b) the relevance, credibility and use of independent evaluations; and (c) the reliability and credibility of decentralized evaluations, including organizational capacity to undertake them. The third review ([DP/2019/13](#)) conducted in 2019, focused on setting out the evaluation policy principles and the institutional architecture of evaluation, including the establishment of a cadre of IEO regional evaluation advisors, procedures for oversight, and quality assurance.
3. The present review focuses on assessing progress made since the last evaluation policy was implemented in 2019, identifying both enabling factors and those constraining effective implementation. In addition, the review examines whether existing procedures, architecture and implementation are fit for purpose and represent best practices in evaluation.
4. UNDP management welcomes the review of the evaluation policy and the opportunity it provides to engage both internally and with the Executive Board on ways to further strengthen the credibility and utility of the UNDP evaluation function, while promoting evidence-informed decision-making and learning.

## II. Findings, conclusions and recommendations

5. The policy review has confirmed the validity of the current UNDP evaluation policy, particularly in safeguarding its independence and integrity. That finding recognizes the ongoing efforts of UNDP and the IEO to improve the organization's performance through training, regular updates to the guidelines, and by elevating evaluation-related performance issues to the highest level of decision-making.
6. The independent review report is structured around four broad areas: evaluation architecture, evaluation policy and procedures, evaluation policy implementation, and evaluation results. The nine findings grouped under those four areas formed the basis for the 17 recommendations in the report.
7. UNDP is pleased to note that the current evaluation policy has upheld the independence of the evaluation function, and remains committed to fulfilling its obligations on financing the independent evaluation function.
8. Although the current evaluation policy principles and procedures of UNDP align with a theory of change, UNDP welcomes the recommendation to enhance the theory of change to better demonstrate how evaluations contribute to the broader strategic goals of sustainable human development.
9. UNDP notes the proposal to expand the current evaluation framework to integrate broader cross-cutting themes such as environmental sustainability and carbon footprint. Management is of the view that bringing greater coherence between the evaluation framework and UNDP programming quality standards – which include cross-cutting themes such as environmental sustainability and 'leave no one behind' – will ensure that the criteria guiding programme assessment and project quality at the design and implementation stages are aligned with those used to evaluate the project.

10. The review suggests redesigning and adjusting the mandatory evaluation criteria by shifting from project evaluations to thematic evaluations (portfolio, thematic, outcome, and impact evaluations), which aligns with the overall shift of the organization towards a portfolio approach under the Strategic Plan, 2022 to 2025. That approach will enable evaluation managers to cluster the projects under strategic themes so as to assess broader development changes, while also facilitating the pooling of resources from multiple projects towards more strategic evaluations.

11. The independent review suggests changing the current evaluation policy review cycle from five years to 10 years, as the current cycle is perceived to be too short, limiting its effectiveness in terms of reflections and adjustments. UNDP takes note of this. However, given broader processes such as the UNDP strategic planning cycle, the United Nations system-wide evaluation policy (2025 to 2030), and the post-2030 Sustainable Development Goals discussions, UNDP believes that maintaining the current cycle would be more effective and would ensure closer alignment with the United Nations development system approach to reviewing the cycle of the evaluation policy.

12. While the quality and utility of decentralized evaluations were highlighted as areas needing further improvement, the comments of UNDP management on the IEO annual report on evaluation, 2023, noted significant improvements. The quality of decentralized evaluations rose from 19 per cent in 2019 to 45 per cent in 2024 (as of October 2024). That included a doubling of the satisfactory rating of decentralized evaluations between 2019 to 2024; the incorporation of evaluation-related key performance indicators in the UNDP integrated results and resources framework; and regular tracking and reporting on decentralized evaluation to senior management by the Organizational Performance Group. To further improve the quality, impact and use of decentralized evaluations, UNDP welcomes the support of IEO in revising the mandatory evaluation criteria to reduce the volume of decentralized evaluations. UNDP also welcomes the recommendation made by the review for a more active role of IEO regional evaluation advisors in elevating the quality and use of decentralized evaluations and contributing to the capacity-building efforts of regional bureaus. It is critical that the IEO regional evaluation advisors complement the work of existing regional evaluation specialists in line with the decentralized evaluation strengthening strategies of each region.

## Annex. Key recommendations and management response

This annex outlines the key recommendations provided in the review and the corresponding responses from UNDP management, highlighting actions to be taken, planned, or under consideration to address the issues identified and enhance the effectiveness of the UNDP evaluation function.

Area 1. Evaluation architecture				
<b>Recommendation 1.</b>				
<p><b>1.1.</b> Extend the tenure of the IEO Director from a single term of 5 years to a single term of <i>at least</i> 6 years.</p> <p><b>1.2.</b> Establish a minimum threshold to ensure that the IEO can fulfil its core obligations even in the case of a major downturn in programming resources.</p>				
<p><b>Management response:</b> UNDP partially agrees with this recommendation for the following reasons:</p> <p>(a) UNDP will consider the recommendation on changing the term of the IEO Director by reviewing the terms of similar roles in comparable organizations.</p> <p>(b) In the context of depleting core resources of the organization, setting minimum thresholds in the evaluation policy delinked from programmatic resources is not feasible. Moreover, UNDP has an established benchmark in its evaluation policy wherein 1 per cent of its programmatic resources is allocated for evaluations, while 0.3 per cent dedicated to the IEO. This can be taken forward in the updated policy.</p>				
<b>Recommendation 2.</b> Incorporate a theory of change in the evaluation policy to clearly link evaluation activities with UNDP strategic goals to improve stakeholder understanding.				
<p><b>Management response:</b> UNDP fully agrees with this recommendation and believes that a theory of change for the revised evaluation policy will deepen the understanding of how evaluations contribute to the broader strategic goal of sustainable human development.</p>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Prepare inputs to the drafting of the new evaluation policy aimed at strengthening the theory of change and quality assurance systems while safeguarding the independence of the evaluation function	June 2025	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and the IEO, with engagement of the regional bureaus	Not initiated	
Area 2. Evaluation procedures and quality assurance				
<b>Recommendation 3.</b> Incorporate explicit provisions for environmental sustainability, carbon footprint, and inclusivity beyond gender in the evaluation policy. The revised policy should also include language related to the ‘leave no one behind’ principle.				
<p><b>Management response:</b> UNDP agrees with the recommendation to update the evaluation framework so as to include criteria that align with UNDP programming quality standards, including environmental sustainability and the ‘leave no one behind’ agenda to facilitate transition to strategic and impact evaluations.</p>				

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Prepare inputs to the drafting of the new evaluation policy to include any new criteria	June 2025	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and the IEO, with engagement of the regional bureaus	Not initiated	
Update the UNDP evaluation guidelines to align with the revised policy, including adjustments to the criteria for decentralized evaluations, transitioning to strategic thematic, portfolio, outcome, and impact evaluations	June 2026	IEO and the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support with the engagement of the regional bureaus		
<b>Recommendation 4.</b> <b>4.1.</b> Encourage greater attention to the identification of operational and programmatic risks during evaluation planning processes. <b>4.2.</b> Conduct regular risk-based analyses of operations in high-risk areas such as procurement and crisis response, in collaboration with central and regional bureaus. <b>4.3.</b> Establish funding arrangements and internal service delivery capacities for IEO to propose and respond to requests to directly manage evaluations in high-risk situations.				
<b>Management response:</b> UNDP welcomes the recommendation and agrees with the inclusion of risk as a key criterion in all evaluations of UNDP during planning and evaluability assessments.  Regarding direct IEO management of evaluations in high-risk situations, UNDP looks forward to engaging with IEO on updating the guidelines and procedures for planning and implementing evaluations of this nature, with a stronger link to the overall portfolio approach. UNDP will explore the possibility of expanding the role and engagement of IEO in such evaluations, ensuring a balance between the oversight role of the IEO in decentralized evaluations and its involvement in the implementation of evaluations.				
<b>Recommendation 5.</b> The IEO should provide more detailed guidance and support for portfolio-level evaluations, including techniques for pooled funding and clustering individual projects under strategic themes for the purpose of co-financing and implementing evaluations that assess impact beyond the contributions of project-specific interventions. Financial thresholds for mandatory evaluations should be removed from the evaluation guidelines.				
<b>Management response:</b> UNDP fully agrees with the recommendation, as it formally endorsed the portfolio policy in 2024 and established dedicated teams and systems to assist with the expanded use of the portfolio approach in the organization. To complement the work of UNDP, specific guidelines on portfolio evaluations, as well as the clustering of project evaluations into more strategic evaluations by IEO, are welcomed. Similarly, UNDP agrees with the removal of mandatory thresholds from the evaluation guidelines, which will allow country offices and regional bureaus to focus more closely on strategic evaluations and prioritize quality over quantity, as recommended in the review.				

Area 3. Evaluation policy implementation				
<b>Recommendation 6.</b> Extend the evaluation policy review cycle to 10 years, while reviewing the work programme and strategy more frequently.				
<b>Management response:</b> UNDP disagrees with this recommendation, as the evaluation policy should be aligned with broader processes such as the UNDP strategic planning cycle, the United Nations system-wide evaluation policy, 2025 to 2030, and the post-2030 Sustainable Development Goals discussion. UNDP believes, therefore, that maintaining the current cycle would be more effective for closer alignment with other corporate processes. UNDP would be open to discussing an extension of the review cycle in the next round of the review.				
<b>Recommendation 7.</b> Shift the focus of the quality assurance process for decentralized evaluation towards:				
<b>7.1.</b> Prioritizing the strategic use of evaluations, such as those for high-risk areas, portfolios, outcomes, thematic, formative, and impact, rather than focusing on project-level evaluations.				
<b>7.2.</b> Conducting project-level evaluations only when they are mandatory for donors.				
<b>Management response:</b> UNDP agrees with the revision of the criteria from project-based assessments to broader thematic and impact evaluations, aligning with the portfolio approach of the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. UNDP welcomes greater coherence between evaluation criteria and UNDP programming quality standards, with a particular focus on the utility of the evaluations to ensure that the criteria used to assess programme or project quality during the design and implementation stages are aligned with those used to evaluate the project.				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Support the integration of programme quality criteria into the evaluation quality criteria during the revision of the evaluation policy and the update of the evaluation guidelines	June 2025	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and the IEO, with engagement of the regional bureaus	Not initiated	
Area 4. Evaluation results				
<b>Recommendation 8.</b> Strengthen mechanisms used to track and ensure implementation of decentralized evaluation recommendations to improve their relevance and utility. Encourage greater direct engagement by regional evaluation advisors to support all phases of the decentralized evaluation process.				
<b>Management response:</b> UNDP welcomes and agrees with the recommendation and looks forward to working with the IEO regional evaluation advisors on ways to support country offices and regional bureaus in utilizing the results of the decentralized evaluations for learning and decision-making. It is worth noting that country offices and regional bureaus already use the outcomes of decentralized evaluations in the design of new programmes and projects, advocacy with partners, and reporting results through the annual reporting mechanisms (ROAR).				
<b>Recommendation 9.</b>				
<b>9.1.</b> Continue to improve the user-friendliness of the Evaluation Resource Centre and the Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics platforms.				
<b>9.2.</b> Continue to work collaboratively with the Executive Office, the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and regional bureaus to strengthen incentives within oversight and quality assurance systems and policies and procedures for learning, and integration of decentralized evaluation findings into organizational decision-making processes.				

- 9.3.** Continue to take a collaborative approach with the Executive Office and central and regional bureaus to co-invest in the strategic application of evaluative knowledge across the organization, including in the design and implementation of strategic communications and advocacy efforts.
- 9.4.** Scale up, enhance and integrate the evaluation community of practice within UNDP. Enhance the dissemination and use of decentralized evaluation results to ensure that they contribute meaningfully to decision-making and organizational learning.

**Management response:** UNDP agrees with the overall recommendation and would like to provide the following clarifications:

(a) UNDP has mechanisms in place to ensure the oversight and use of decentralized evaluations. In line with the Executive Board decision 2022/3 , UNDP institutionalized four key performance indicators on evaluations that are tracked and reported to the Organizational Performance Group, while each regional bureau prepares and tracks its annual decentralized evaluation strengthening strategy and reports it to the Organizational Performance Group.

(b) UNDP welcomes the recommendation regarding the enhancement and integration of the community of practice. In that regard the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support has recently developed a new results-based management ('RBM') strategy that is complemented by an online 'hub'. UNDP believes that the hub can effectively serve as a community of practice, facilitating knowledge exchange on best practices in the areas of both results-based management and evaluations. UNDP also welcomes IEO as a co-convenor of this platform, with a particular focus on evaluations and learning from them.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Building on the RBM hub, the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and the IEO to establish and co-convene a community of practice on monitoring and evaluation to strengthen evaluation learning and promote the use of evaluation findings to inform decision-making and enhance high-quality programmes, portfolios and projects	December 2025	IEO and the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, with engagement of the regional bureaus	Ongoing	