**22 April 2022**

Information note: A road map for strengthening decentralized evaluations in UNDP

# Background

1. The revised UNDP evaluation policy adopted by the Executive Board in 2019 ([DP/2019/29](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/206/00/PDF/N1920600.pdf?OpenElement) and decision 2019/19) sets out the organization’s evaluation systems and functions. UNDP has a bifurcated evaluation system, with thematic, programmatic and country programme evaluations carried out by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), and decentralized evaluations commissioned by the programme units (policy and regional bureaux and country offices).
2. The revised evaluation policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of the IEO. Pertinent to the issue of decentralized evaluation, these include: “assessing the quality of decentralized evaluations of UNDP, [the United Nations Capital Development Fund] and [the United Nations Volunteers programme], and monitoring compliance with best international evaluation and data-collection standards including the [United Nations Evaluation Group] norms and standards, code of conduct and ethical guidelines.” (2019/29, para. 42(d)). In addition, the IEO is expected through its regional evaluation advisers, to: “work with senior managers accountable for development results in the regions” whose roles are to “assess regional and country office evaluation plans, help to ensure that qualified independent evaluators are hired for regional and country office-commissioned evaluations, assess the quality and utility of regional and country office-commissioned evaluations, support capacity-building on evaluation and manage independent country programme evaluations led by the Independent Evaluation Office.” (para. 43)
3. The policy specifies that UNDP programme and policy units “commission decentralized evaluations according to evaluation plans that coincide with relevant programmes (regional and country) and global projects” which are to be “carried out by independent external consultants, and UNDP management shall take all necessary actions to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the process and persons hired.” (para. 38) Subject to delegation of authority from the UNDP Administrator, the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) “advises regional bureaux on the decentralized evaluation function for UNDP” and “works with the monitoring and evaluation staff of UNDP units to ensure that evaluation plans are properly implemented.” Together with the IEO, the Bureau “provides guidance to UNDP units on the use of evaluation findings and lessons to improve organizational decision-making and accountability and synthesizes evaluation lessons for institutional learning.” (para. 39)
4. UNDP implements approximately 300 decentralized evaluations annually, providing a wealth of information that is available in the UNDP [Evaluation Resource Centre](https://erc.undp.org/). The quality of decentralized evaluation shows improvement: in 2021, 42 per cent of decentralized evaluations out of 272 that were quality-assessed by the IEO rated ‘satisfactory’. In the meantime, several challenges remained in term of the implementation, coverage and usability of these decentralized evaluations. The revised evaluation policy retains the goal of a 1 per cent budget allocation for evaluation across the organization, with 0.3 per cent to cover the work of the IEO and 0.7 per cent for decentralized evaluations. While IEO expenditures are approaching the 0.3 per cent benchmark, having reached 0.25 per cent in 2020, overall UNDP expenditure on evaluations was 0.32 per cent, making the spending for evaluations 0.57 per cent of total programme expenditure, short of the 1 per cent commitment under the 2019 evaluation policy.[[1]](#footnote-2)
5. In response to the [annual report on evaluation, 2020](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/065/84/PDF/N2106584.pdf?OpenElement) (which highlighted gaps in the quality, coverage, credibility and usability of decentralized evaluations as well as the low spending on decentralized evaluations), the Executive Board, in decision 2021/5, encouraged UNDP to “continue this effort to identify and build evaluation capacities and resources to increase the satisfactory rating of decentralized evaluations significantly.” At the first regular session of 2022, the Executive Board, in decision 2022/3, requested UNDP management and the IEO to “formulate a plan to improve the independence, reliability, and quality of decentralized evaluations and to present it to the Executive Board at its annual session 2022.” The present report has been prepared in response to that decision.
6. This road map for strengthening decentralized evaluations in UNDP provides a plan of action to be implemented in conjunction with the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. The actions taken during the previous strategic plan period (2018-2021) to support decentralized evaluations are discussed in annex I and the financial data are contained in the table in annex II.

# Strengthening decentralized evaluations, 2022-2025

1. To further strengthen and improve the quality of decentralized evaluations and improve management, oversight and the culture of evaluation across the organization, the Executive Office, BPPS, regional bureaux and IEO collaborated in 2021 on the development of the road map. Approved in November 2021, the road map includes implementation and enhanced oversight of decentralized evaluations to improve their independence, quality and use for management decision-making. It is expected that all elements of the road map will be undertaken in collaboration between the above-mentioned entities throughout 2022, laying a foundation for oversight and continuous strengthening of the decentralized evaluation function. This paper outlines these action points along with additional support which has emerged from the discussions and strategies developed by the programme and policy bureaux.
2. When considering ways to strengthen the decentralized evaluation function at UNDP, it is useful to delineate two sets of interrelated pillars: (a) implementation, independence and quality; and (b) accountability and use. The action items listed below include the responsible bureaux and the timelines for completion.

# Pillar 1. Implementation, independence and quality

1. **Strategy for strengthening decentralized evaluations (regional bureaux and BPPS/Crisis Bureau) 2022-2025**. In support of the UNDP commitment to strengthening decentralized evaluations, all programme and policy bureaux (regional bureaux and BPPS/Crisis Bureau) have developed bureau-specific strategies for implementation starting in January 2022. The strategies contain commitments to strengthen management accountability and strategic actions to improve the coverage, quality and use of decentralized evaluations in decision-making. The strategies are being operationalized through the annual workplans of each bureau. Key performance metrics have been developed for senior management to track and support the implementation of these strategies. All bureaux are required to report quarterly on their performance through the established Organizational Performance Group review and decision process.
2. **Strengthening UNDP programming tools related to evaluation (BPPS) 2021-2025.** For this strategic planning cycle, UNDP has introduced a set of quality standards for programmes and projects, with rating procedures for the design, implementation and closure stages. UNDP has updated and strengthened its programming tools so that the credible evidence generated from evaluations can be compared against key assumptions and expected outcomes and outputs as established in the programme ‘theory of change’. These standards are used to rate the explicit use of evaluation, with appropriate referencing, in programme and project design and availability of fully costed evaluation plans. For ongoing projects, the standards look at the use of evaluation in decision-making and the quality of decentralized evaluations. In 2022-2025, UNDP will enhance the use of those programming tools to ensure that lessons from past evaluations are used for programme and project design, and that programmes and projects produce evaluable evidence.
3. **Enhanced quality assurance and completion of evaluation plans (BPPS) 2021-2025**. To address the issue of timely completion and balanced coverage of planned evaluations, UNDP has strengthened the mechanisms to review the quality, robustness and coverage of evaluation plans as part of the quality assurance process for new country programme documents (CPDs), through the programme appraisal committee reviews. The quality assurance of evaluation plans focuses on three major areas: (a) inclusion of more strategic evaluations and fewer stand-alone project evaluations; (b) greater balance of evaluation coverage in all programme areas; and (c) ensuring that all mandatory evaluations are properly timed, sequenced and resourced. As per the guideline, regional bureaux are requested to have evaluation plans reviewed at the beginning of the year and midyear for timely adjustments. The quality of evaluation plans is included as part of the Programme Quality Index in the Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF) for 2022-2025 and will be closely monitored in the next four years.
4. **Evaluation express roster (BPPS) 2021- 2023.** To address the issue of long procurement processes and the increased demand for quality evaluators, an evaluation express roster was established in 2021 under the GPN/Experts Roster for Rapid Response. This roster is currently comprised of 75 vetted, capable and qualified individuals who can be called upon as international consultants to carry out independent evaluations. There will be a new call for applicants to the roster in 2022. The aim is to strengthen the pool of evaluators for coverage across the six signature solutions and three enablers; improve geographic and language coverage, including French, Portuguese and Arabic; improve the onboarding of consultants once they are recruited; and better track good quality evaluators.
5. **Evaluation training (regional bureaux and IEO) 2022-2025.** The pandemic has held back in-person training but has accelerated online training and support from IEO and regional bureaux. The regional bureaux strategies for strengthening decentralized evaluations take into account the need for further training for both new and existing staff that is tailored to meet specific needs of each bureau. The regional bureaux and IEO will conduct a needs assessment survey of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) focal points in 2022 to identify areas for targeted training and support. The trainings listed below are currently ongoing and will be conducted in 2022-2025:
6. **Certified evaluation training for M&E focal points.** Regional bureaux will ensure that all country office M&E focal points have taken and passed the UNDP-IEO online certified training course, which was launched in 2020;
7. **Regional bureaux training.** IEO, through its regional focal points, will support the regional bureaux in delivering targeted support to country offices;
8. **Short, targeted training.** IEO will develop online training and guidance around specific elements of the evaluation process (evaluability assessment, theory of change development, evaluation team management, data provision, evaluation report review, management response and key action development and evaluation use);
9. **IPDET and other training opportunities.** IEO will continue to support UNDP colleagues to take part in training opportunities such as the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET), the European Evaluation Society and the National Evaluation Capacities Conference.
10. **Quarterly quality assessment process (IEO) 2022-2025.** Starting from 2022, the IEO will undertake quality assessments of decentralized evaluations on a quarterly basis to ensure timely input to country offices.
11. **Evaluator and commissioner dispute resolution process (IEO and programme units) 2022.** Rolled out as part of the evaluation guidelines, the dispute resolution process provides clear channels for evaluators to report wrongdoing in programmes and projects, through the established Office of Audit and Investigation hotlines. External evaluators hired to conduct decentralized evaluations can raise disputes with the regional bureau director and IEO should they feel that undue pressure is being placed on them to adjust evaluation results.
12. **IEO regional focal points (IEO and regional bureaux) 2021-2025:** In 2021, IEO established regional focal points who work closely with counterparts in regional bureaux. The focal points have participated in the programme appraisal committee process in some regions, reviewing and commenting on the evaluability, feasibility and adequacy of CPD evaluation plans. The participation of IEO regional focal points in the appraisal committee process will strengthen the assessment of the evaluability of CPDs and the adequacy and coverage of evaluation plans. IEO regional focal points will continue to work with regional bureaux to provide technical support to decentralized evaluations including training of M&E focal points, clarification of guidance and evaluation approaches and planning for evaluation.
13. **Additional evaluation guidance (IEO) 2022-2023.** Building on the extensive guidance developed in 2019 and updated in 2021, and the guidance developed to support evaluation during the pandemic, IEO has identified several areas where additional evaluation guidance may be needed:
14. **Portfolio approach and complex evaluation guidance (IEO).** As UNDP moves increasingly towards a portfolio approach, new guidance on evaluating portfolios will be developed;
15. **Inclusion of the social and environmental standards in evaluations (IEO).** All UNDP projects and programmes should now consider their social and environmental impacts. IEO is developing guidance for evaluators to assess the level to which these have been considered in project and programme implementation;
16. **Evaluating innovation (IEO).**Given that UNDP has placed a considerable focus on innovation during the past strategic plan period, IEO will develop guidance on how to evaluate these activities and their approaches;
17. **Impact evaluations (IEO).** The evaluation of the impact of projects requires a detailed approach and setting of benchmarks from the outset. Currently, UNDP carries out very few impact evaluations. Improved guidance will be established to help strengthen this approach and identify project/programme impacts.
18. **Implementation of key programme/project evaluations (IEO) 2022.** IEO will review the UNDP portfolio to consider the balance of evaluations on large and strategic projects, noting that the evaluation requirements for some large-scale programmes, in particular the Global Environment Facility (GEF), are mandatory and extensively evaluated, while other programmes of similar stature and significance lack firm evaluation requirements and have not been well evaluated. The IEO will review the portfolio to ensure that mandatory benchmarks for evaluations are being met and will recommend additional mandatory benchmarks as needed.

# Pillar 2. Accountability and use

1. **Evaluation scorecard and key performance indicators (BPPS) 2021-2025.** Developed by UNDP in 2021 with input from IEO, the Evaluation Scorecard provides UNDP managers and staff with real-time data of critical evaluation performance to enable on-time tracking and oversight with key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs address the coverage, quality, accountability, use and evaluation capacity of decentralized evaluations. They have provided an overview of high-risk or critical areas that require thorough analysis and management actions, and increased efficiency by reducing manual analysis.
2. **Quarterly monitoring and senior management review of decentralized evaluation performance (UNDP, 2022-2025).** Using the Evaluation Scorecard, on a quarterly basis management is able to closely monitor, analyse and disseminate data on performance to enhance the coverage, timeliness and quality of decentralized evaluations. These analytics support the identification of critical areas that allow regional bureaux to take timely management actions. Special attention is given to: (a) planned versus completed evaluations; (b) quality assessment ratings; and (c) implementation rates of management actions. In November 2021, the Organizational Performance Group decided that senior management (through the Group) will review the KPIs on decentralized evaluation and the status of implementation of bureau-specific decentralized evaluation plans on a quarterly basis.
3. **New Tier 3 indicators on evaluation performance for the IRRF of the Strategic Plan (BPPS) 2022-2025**. Building on the lessons UNDP learned from the 2018-2021 strategic plan period, stronger indicators to monitor the UNDP evaluation performance were introduced in the IRRF for 2022-2025. These indicators will provide evidence-based performance information covering:

1.1.1: Quality of fully costed evaluation plan (part of the Programme Quality Index)

3.2.1: Percentage of decentralized evaluations quality-assessed which are highly satisfactory or satisfactory

3.2.2: Implementation rate of actions in evaluation management responses

7.1.1 Percentage of impact, thematic, programme, outcome, and portfolio evaluations out of total evaluation.

IRRF indicator performance against annual milestones will be reported in an annex of the annual report of the Administrator.

1. **Bureau directors and resident representatives compact/annual performance and inclusion of evaluation KPIs (Executive Office, regional bureaux, BPPS, Crisis Bureau) 2022-2025.** Each regional strategy for strengthening decentralized evaluation will be incorporated into the 2022 integrated workplans of the regional bureaux, country offices, BPPS and the Crisis Bureau for systematic and effective tracking, monitoring and achievement of the strategy and related KPIs. In addition, these KPIs will be included in the 2022 performance compact of bureau directors and country office senior management.
2. **Decentralized evaluation performance ratings (IEO and BPPS), 2022.** The decentralized evaluation function will be strengthened to include an independent rating assessing a project’s consistency with the UNDP quality standards for programming. IEO will independently review the UNDP quality standards to ensure alignment with OECD-DAC quality criteria*.*
3. **Further enhancement of the Evaluation Resource Centre (IEO) 2022-2023.** The Centre includes dashboards on global, regional and country-level implementation of evaluations. The KPIs in the Evaluation Scorecard detailed in paragraph 19 above are drawn from the Evaluation Resource Centre. The process of distilling important lessons from UNDP evaluations in the Centre has been enhanced using the AIDA (Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics) platform, which enables users to scan all 5,000 evaluations and extract lessons for use in programme and project design and implementation. The Centre is being upgraded to strengthen the portal’s security, usability and reporting and oversight tools.
4. **Evaluation use (IEO and BPPS) 2022-2025.** All evaluations are required to produce a detailed management response and key action follow-up plan that includes data on implementation, monitoring and reporting. (This is one of the KPIs detailed above.) Moving forward, the IEO will conduct periodic examinations of the impact and use of evaluations and the extent to which they are informing management decision-making and new programme and project design. Further guidance and required actions will be developed as needed based on the outcome of these examinations.
5. **Evaluation awards (IEO, ongoing since 2021).** To promote the recognition and use of high-quality decentralized evaluations, IEO launched the Evaluation Excellence Awards in 2021, which grant recognition to decentralized evaluations in three categories: outstanding evaluation; innovative evaluation; and gender-responsive evaluation.

#  Conclusions and next steps

1. UNDP and IEO are committed to improving the credibility, quality and usability of decentralized evaluations for learning and accountability to inform management decision-making. Actions taken over the last several years have signalled this commitment, through the development of targeted decentralized strategies for strengthening evaluations by relevant bureaux, and through a partnership between UNDP and IEO to target support to improve the scope and quality of decentralized evaluations.
2. As outlined in the present report, UNDP and IEO are committed to meeting the Executive Board’s expectations for a robust and credible evaluation function that achieves the goals of the revised evaluation policy. Moving forward, UNDP will continue to broaden and strengthen evaluation oversight and support structures, ensure that large and strategic programmes are adequately covered, and provide sufficient funding for regional evaluation strategies to be achieved.

# Annex I. Additional support to decentralized evaluations from 2018 to 2021

1. Between 2018 and 2021, UNDP and IEO have responded to concerns of the Executive Board on the coverage and quality of decentralized evaluations by undertaking a series of steps to support country offices in undertaking evaluations and by providing oversight of decentralized evaluations.

**Evaluation guidelines**

2. **New UNDP Evaluation Guidelines (IEO, Regional Bureaux and BPPS, 2019).** The evaluation guidelines were updated to reflect changes in evaluation in UNDP and to bring them in line with the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The guidelines were updated in 2021 to reflect recent policy changes – including the gender equality strategy 2018-2021, the guidance note on disability-inclusive development and the 2020 social and environmental standards – and recurrent weaknesses observed in evaluations, as well as the feedback received by colleagues through training and interviews. The evaluation guidelines are available in all six official United Nations languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

3.  **COVID-19 evaluation guidance (IEO, GEF and regional bureaux, 2020-2021).** The IEO worked closely with regional bureaux in 2020 to develop and roll out COVID-19 evaluation guidance to support country offices in adapting to the constraints imposed by the pandemic and ensuring that evaluation commitments were maintained.

**4. M&E focal point induction package (IEO 2021).** Recognizing the need to equip new staff members responsible for evaluation in regional bureaux and country offices with sufficient knowledge and technique to conduct decentralized evaluations in UNDP, the IEO introduced an induction package that gives access to online training, guidance and templates.

**Evaluation training**

5. **Regional bureau training (regional bureau-led, with input from GEF, IEO and BPPS, 2018-2021).** The IEO and BPPS had supported regional bureaux in designing and conducting evaluation training programmes.

6. **UNDP evaluation ‘Ask us anything’ sessions (IEO, BPPS, GEF and regional bureaux, 2020-2021).** During the pandemic from 2020 to 2021, IEO held seven ‘ask us anything’ sessions attended by over 400 staff from across the organization who were able to raise questions on evaluation implementation.

7. **In-person training (IEO and regional bureaux, 2019).** Supporting the roll-out of the evaluation guidelines in 2019, IEO, BPPS, the GEF and regional bureaux collaborated on three two-day workshops with 158 M&E focal points and programme staff from 100 country offices.

8. **Online training (IEO, 2020):** In mid-2020, the IEO launched two online training courses aligned with UNDP guidelines and requirements, including a mandatory certified course for all UNDP staff planning to implement and manage evaluations, and a shorter training introducing the evaluation requirements of the organization. By the end of 2021, 487 colleagues had completed the introductory course and 393 had completed the certified course.

9. **International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) and the National Evaluation Capacities Conference (IEO, 2018 to 2021).** The IEO has used its regular (core) and other resources (non-core) funding to support staff members from across the five regions to participate in the world-renowned IPDET. IEO also provided bursaries for UNDP staff to take part in and support government personnel in the National Evaluation Capacities Conference in 2019.

**Annex II.**

**Overall budget for evaluation in UNDP, 2018 to 2021**

(In millions of Unites States dollars)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **2018** | **%** | **2019** | **%** | **2020** | **%** | **2021** | **%** |
| **IEO expenditure** | $8.72 | 0.19% | $10.90 | 0.25% | $11.24 | 0.25% | $11.4 | 0.24% |
| **Country office expenditure** | $11.53 | 0.25% | $13.24 | 0.30% | $12.29 | 0.27% | $14.27 | 0.29% |
| **Regional expenditure** | $1.83 | 0.04% | $1.56 | 0.04% | $2.25 | 0.05% | $2.13 | 0.04% |
| **Total expenditure** | **$22.08** | 0.48% | **$25.70** | 0.58% | **$25.78** | 0.57% | **$27.8** | **0.58%** |
| **UNDP programme expenditure** | $4,603.91 |  | $4,410.59 |  | $4,506.86 |  | $4,802 |  |
| % resources spent for evaluations | 0.48% |  | 0.58% |  | 0.57% |  | 0.58% |  |

Source: Calculated from evaluation expenditure, UNDP estimated staff costs and additional evaluation costs



1. See annex II for the financial data on decentralized evaluations for the period 2018-2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)