Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
CHINA

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
CHINA

REPORTS PUBLISHED UNDER THE ICPE SERIES

Afghanistan
(Islamic Republic of)
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados and OECS
Belarus
Benin
Bhutan
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Cambodia
Cameroon
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo (Democratic
Republic of)
Congo (Republic of)
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Equatorial Guinea
Egypt
El Salvador
Eswatini
Ethiopia
Gabon
Georgia
Ghana
Guatemala
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Honduras
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Jamaica
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Kosovo
Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan
Lao People's
Democratic Republic
Liberia
Libya
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Mauritania
Mexico
Moldova (Republic of)
Mongolia
Montenegro
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
North Macedonia
Pacific Islands
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Serbia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syria
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Togo
Tunisia
Türkiye
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: China

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would like to thank all those who contributed to this evaluation.

IEO TEAM

Directorate: Isabelle Mercier, Director
Richard Jones, Deputy Director

CPE section chief: Richard Jones

Lead evaluator: David Slattery

Research analyst: Rim Benhima

Evaluation consultants: Zenda Ofir, Shuo Liu, Haina Lu

Publishing and outreach:
Flora Jimenez and Iben Hjorth

Administrative support: Sonam Choetsho

The IEO could not have completed the evaluation without the support of the following:

STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

UNDP China staff: Beate Trankmann (Resident Representative), James George (Deputy Resident Representative), Sun Qian and other staff.

Other stakeholders and partners: Government of China, representatives of other United Nations agencies, civil society, nongovernmental organizations and bilateral and multilateral development partners.

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS vii

EVALUATION BRIEF: CHINA 1

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION 4

1.1 Objectives and Scope 5

1.2 Methodology 5

1.3 Country Context 6

1.4 UNDP in China 8

CHAPTER 2. FINDINGS 12

2.1 Reducing Poverty and Inequality 13

2.2 Environment 16

2.3 South-South and Humanitarian Cooperation 18

2.4 Cross-cutting Issues 23

CHAPTER 3. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 30

3.1 Conclusions 31

3.2 Recommendations 33

3.3 Key recommendations and management response 37

ANNEXES 41

LIST OF FIGURES AND BOXES

Figure 1.	Expenditure by outcome, 2021-2024	9
Figure 2.	UNDP annual expenditure by source of funding, 2012–2024 (at current prices)	10
Figure 3.	Programme budget, expenditure and execution rate, 2012-2024	10
Figure 4.	China per capita GNI, 2002–2022 and key development status thresholds	11
Figure 5.	United Nations revenue from China, 2013 to 2022	22
Figure 6.	United Nations revenue from China, 2013 to 2022 by contribution type	22
Figure 7.	Selected results from the 2020 Partner Survey for the China Country Office	24
Figure 8.	China's cofinancing of UNDP GEF projects reflects strong ownership and increasingly tougher requirements	25
Figure 9.	UNDP China expenditure by gender marker, 2012-2024	27
Box 1.	Key National Priorities Supported by UNDP	7

ACRONYMS

COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CPD	Country Programme Document
GDF	Global Development Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GRES	Gender Results Effectiveness Scale
HCFC	Hydrochlorofluorocarbon
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODS	Ozone-depleting Substance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSC	South-South Cooperation
SSTC	South-South Triangular Cooperation
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Evaluation Brief: China

Country Context

China is the world's second-largest economy, with a gross domestic product surpassing US$15 trillion. China leveraged its economic expansion to lift over 800 million people out of poverty and is now on the cusp of the World Bank's $13,845 per capita GDP threshold for high-income status (China reached $12,720 in 2023).

Although China largely eliminated extreme poverty, segments of its population remain vulnerable to economic shocks, while income inequality and regional disparities persist. China's economy remained resilient, but growth slowed in recent years, and structural factors make it unlikely that it will return to historical highs. Challenges looking forward include an ageing population and the cost of decarbonization. Globally, anaemic growth due to the lingering effects of the pandemic, high inflation and debt is feeding into competition for resources, anti-globalization sentiments, systemic instabilities and geopolitical tensions. In this context, China's integration into global value chains and international institutions is a source of both strength and vulnerability.

China's size and economic weight make it central to the resolution of global cross-border problems. Given planetary boundaries, countries in the Global South that are now where China was two decades ago cannot follow the same growth path. However, China's lessons will be key to their ability to adopt more sustainable, efficient and greener development pathways. As both a major global donor and the largest greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter, China's development path and leadership in global cooperation are critical to achieving the SDGs and global climate goals.

UNDP in China and Country Programme Under Review

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) became China's first development cooperation partner in 1979 and will mark half a century of partnership with China during its next CPD. Its work over the last four decades tracked China's development story closely, shifting from that of a traditional donor to that of a partner within and beyond its national borders, including in its activities within the framework of South-South Cooperation (SSC).

The 2021–2025 UNDP China Country Programme is structured around three outcomes: (1) reducing poverty and inequality; (2) fostering a healthier and more resilient environment; and (3) strengthening South-South and humanitarian cooperation. Country Programme expenditure reached $95 million as of September 2024, below the $205 million CPD target, due to COVID-19 disruptions, declining external financing opportunities and increasing competition for environment-related grants. The programme is primarily funded through multilateral environmental funds (accounting for over half of expenditure during the current Country Programme) and the Government of China (around a quarter of programme expenditure), with a mixture of private sector foundations and partners making up the balance. UNDP regular resource allocations to China are negligible.

Key Findings and Conclusions

UNDP continues to play a valued role in China, leveraging its mandate, comparative advantage and limited resources.

With limited financing opportunities, UNDP kept poverty and inequality on the agenda through diverse interventions increasingly framed around supporting China in reaping the benefits and mitigating the human cost of its clean energy transition.

UNDP played a valuable role in supporting China's strong progress and record of achievement under international environmental agreements. UNDP was the lead implementer of Global Environment Facility (GEF) biodiversity support in China from the outset of GEF financing for biodiversity in 1994, contributing to China's expansion of protected areas, successful cross-border cooperation in marine conservation (the Yellow Sea) and efforts to reverse the decline in China's globally significant agricultural biodiversity. As the lead agency for China's implementation of the Montreal Protocol, UNDP worked with the Chinese Government on more than 190 projects since the protocol was established, contributing to the success of this mechanism in phasing out ozone-depleting substances (ODSs).

By backing global commitments to reinvigorate the South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation mandate of the United Nations development system, UNDP supported the evolution of China's global development policies and systems, a role valued by stakeholders in China and in the Global North. Reflecting China's importance as a source of learning, technology transfer and investment in the Global South, projects increasingly included explicit commitments to these alongside domestically-focused objectives.

UNDP paid strong consistent attention to gender equality, with 80 percent of expenditures in GEN2 projects and a Silver Gender Seal certification, a major improvement on the emphasis given to gender equality in the recent past.

Given China's emergence as a major economic and technological power, UNDP's role is breaking the traditional logic of development assistance as a process of North-South transfer by helping to facilitate relationships and learning in multiple directions, with potential to do more in this area. However, UNDP did not meet its potential as a partner in the delivery of China's development assistance despite its mandate and advantages within the UN system as a conduit for South-South cooperation.

Sustainability of UNDP operations in China is the core issue facing the Country Office. With the likely continuing decline in external development finance for China and absent changes in the UNDP's business model, UNDP's future presence will depend on China's willingness to finance it. Maintaining a meaningful presence will require UNDP to be clear-eyed about what the core value of its proposition is given China's stage of development, role in the world and changes in China and the global environment.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Sharpen UNDP's value proposition for China and global development cooperation: UNDP should maintain and strengthen its support for South-South cooperation and South-North exchanges as a key cross-cutting consideration in its partnership with China. UNDP should maintain its support for domestic policy development and debate framed in the context of China's commitments to meeting global norms and standards and use its global network and knowledge to enrich China's debate with evidence of its international experience.

Recommendation 2. Finance the partnership: UNDP should work with China to agree to a government financing model that will offset declining external financing opportunities and enable a more strategic partnership underpinned by flexible and predictable financing. UNDP should intensify discussions with China about its value as a conduit for Chinese development finance, its key role as a component of effective South-South support and the importance of core financing in sustaining its global operations.

Recommendation 3. Prioritize applied policy research and advocacy: UNDP should strengthen its focus on applied policy research along with smart, understated policy advice and advocacy tied to China's commitments to global objectives. Given China's huge scale and UNDP's constrained financing, UNDP's influence is likely to be greater through smart policy and advisory work rather than small downstream investments with weak links to any policy or advocacy agenda.

Recommendation 4. Reorient monitoring and evaluation to better reflect UNDP's value and influence and promote learning: Given China's vast scale and high institutional capacity and ownership over external support, UNDP's value lies in its ability to contribute effectively and influence policy discussion and debate rather than impacts that can be directly attributed to UNDP directly. Facilitating exchange of lessons from China's development should also be a key emphasis for monitoring and evaluation systems and external communications.

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives and Scope

UNDP Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) have two objectives: to strengthen accountability to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board, and to promote learning and inform new Country Programme Documents (CPDs). This ICPE covers UNDP's China Country Programme implemented under the framework of the 2021–2025 CPD. The terms of reference are in Annex 1.

1.2 Methodology

The ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process and methodology and United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The ICPE methodology included the following.

- Review of external and internal research papers and UNDP documentation (strategies, designs, evaluations, audits).
- Consultations with seven national government partners: China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges; Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development; Ministry of Commerce (Department of International Trade and Economic Affairs); Ministry of Ecology and Environment; Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs; China International Development Cooperation Agency; and National Forestry and Grassland Administration. Consultations were also held with twelve partners and stakeholders, including universities and think-tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign missions. Consultations also covered provincial and local government representatives, private sector representatives, NGOs and beneficiaries. Interviews were also held with all members of the UNDP China Country Office.
- Field visits to review five projects across five provinces (Sichuan, Fujian, Jiangsu, Jiangsu, Shandong), including the Water Governance programme; SDG Finance Umbrella project, Sustainable Development and Innovation in Suzhou project, Solvent Sector Plan Stage II (Montreal Protocol), and Strengthening the Protected Area Network for Migratory Bird Conservation Along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway in China.
- Analysis of UNDP and external data on programme financing trends and programme quality.
- Analysis of gender mainstreaming across the Country Programme and operations through UNDP gender markers and the IEO Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES). Where possible, sex-disaggregated data were assessed against programme outcomes.
- Ratings of Country Programme performance covering relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.
- Limitations included limited time for fieldwork given the scale and scope of UNDP's work in China and lack of resources for systematic independent data collection on programme impacts or verification of available sources. This means that findings are only as accurate as the data on which they were based. To mitigate risks of error, effort was made to ensure that key findings are based on credible sources, such as evaluations commissioned by the Country Office, academic studies and data collection efforts and triangulation of sources and methods. Counterfactuals are largely unavailable, making it difficult or impossible in most cases to quantify the impact of UNDP's contributions to outcomes achieved by China.
- Quality assurance of the ICPE report included reviews by IEO's senior management and internal and external experts. The UNDP China Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and the Government of China were given the opportunity to review and comment on the report.

1.3 Country Context

Since China opened up in the late 1970s, gross domestic product (GDP) growth of over 9 percent annually underpinned what the World Bank has described as "the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history." In the process, China lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty—more than 100 million since 2012 alone[1] and declared that it had eliminated extreme poverty and achieved its goal of building a moderately prosperous society in 2021.[2] China overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy in 2012 and now has a GDP surpassing $15 trillion.[3] China is on the cusp of High-Income Status, reaching $12,720 per capita GDP in 2023, just short of the $13,845 threshold set by the World Bank.[4] China's economic success was accompanied by progress in governance effectiveness,[5] combating corruption[6] and promoting gender equality.[7]

Although extreme poverty was largely been eliminated, pockets of China's population remain vulnerable, and inland provinces and rural areas lag behind.[8] In 2023, an estimated 17.2 percent of the population lived on less than $6.85 a day, the World Bank's Upper-Middle-Income Country poverty line.[9] Continuing challenges with gender inequality are evident in a skewed sex ratio at birth, lower female participation in the labour market (61.3 percent for women versus 75.9 percent for men) and an increasing wage gap.

Looking forward, China is emphasizing high-quality development as a key objective, transitioning from rapid to sustainable and innovative growth and emphasizing environmental sustainability and balanced regional development (Box 1). By 2035, China aims to attain the level of medium-developed country and of developed economy in time for the centenary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 2049. The Chinese Government estimates that this will require a doubling of per capita GDP in the 15 years to 2035, equivalent to annual GDP growth of around 4.7 percent over that period.[10]

With its emergence as a major economic power, China became a central player in global affairs. China is now the world's largest official bilateral lender by some margin, lending approximately $78.9 billion in 2021 (in constant 2021 dollars) and $1.4 trillion between 2002 and 2021, or 28 percent of cumulative global commitments recorded by OECD. China also became a major aid donor, providing between $5 to $8 billion in foreign aid annually from 2015 to 2022, ranking it between 6th and 12th by size among OECD Development Assistance Committee member countries and major emerging donors reporting to it. China's contributions to South-South cooperation and humanitarian cooperation extend to more than 150 countries, with over 30 international organizations participating.[11]

---

1 World Bank (2019), The World Bank in China: Overview.

2 National Poverty Alleviation Summary and Commendation Conference Grandly Held; Xi Jinping Awards Honors to Models of Poverty Alleviation and Delivers an Important Speech, Source: Government of China: National Poverty Alleviation Summary and Commendation Conference Grandly Held; Xi Jinping Awards Honors to Models of Poverty Alleviation and Delivers an Important Speech.

3 International Monetary Fund (2024), People's Republic of China: 2023 Article IV Consultation (February).

4 World Bank (2024), Country Classifications by Income Level for FY24.

5 World Bank, Government Effectiveness: Estimate–China.

6 Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, China.

7 China's Gender Development Index score improved from 0.847 in 1990 to 0.962 in 2022, reflecting narrowing gaps between men and women in education, health and economic resources. China also improved its ranking on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, which draws on data covering three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market, even though its ranking (48th in 2022) was lower than in previous periods due to more rapid improvements in other countries.

8 National Bureau of Statistics (2021), Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-02/28/content_5676015.htm

9 World Bank, China Overview, China Overview: Development news, research, data.

10 Hu, A., Zhou, S., Xie, Y. (2025). 2035 China: Achieving the Vision of Common Prosperity. In *Study of the National Conditions of Modernization with Chinese Characteristics. Understanding Xi Jinping's Governance*, Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-7447-0_11

11 UNDP (2024), China's Official Development Finance: Strategic Shifts and Implications (unpublished).

BOX 1. Key National Priorities Supported by UNDP

China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) emphasizes "sustained and healthy economic development," encompassing "higher quality, more efficiency, more fairness and more sustainable and safer development." Cutting-edge science, technology and innovation are at the centre of this shift.

People and Prosperity: China's vision of achieving prosperity for all ("common prosperity"), as highlighted by the 14th Five-Year Plan and policies such as the Resolution of the Third Plenum. This includes efforts to ensure equitable access to education, healthcare and housing, narrow gaps between urban and rural areas and social strata and strengthen safety nets for vulnerable populations.

Planet: Green development and an "ecological civilization" are prominent priorities, in particular improving air quality, reducing carbon emissions and enhancing resource efficiency with a view to promoting "high-quality" development. "Ecological Red Lines" aim to protect critical ecosystems, promote national parks and eco-compensation and the circular economy. Climate change mitigation measures include improving the energy mix and promoting low-carbon technologies while advocating for international cooperation in environmental governance.

Partnerships: Priorities include fostering partnerships to address global challenges and building a "global community with shared benefits," primarily through international development cooperation and South-South cooperation initiatives positioning China as a key player in global development efforts.

Source: China's 14th Five-Year-Plan for Economic and Social Development (2021-2025)

China implemented ambitious environmental policies to combat pollution and reduce carbon emissions, including the world's largest emissions trading scheme.[12] China leads the world in renewable energy capacity, boasting the largest installed capacity of wind and solar power globally,[13] and in electric vehicle production and adoption.[14] In 2023, China commissioned as much solar photovoltaic as the entire world in 2022, while its wind additions grew by 66 percent.[15] China became a major contributor to climate finance globally, with the Government of China estimating that it provided and mobilized more than $24 billion in climate finance to developing countries since 2016. The World Resources Institute estimates that China's climate finance to developing countries amounted to roughly 6 percent of climate finance provided by developed countries between 2013 and 2022.[16] Given that China is the world's largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the sixth highest in per capita terms, its continued leadership will be critical to achieving the Paris Agreement targets.[17]

While China's economy remained resilient, growth slowed in recent years, and structural factors make it unlikely that it will return to historical highs. In the medium term, the IMF is forecasting a deceleration from 5 percent growth in 2024 to 3.3 percent in 2029.[18] Foreign direct investment fell to the lowest level on record in 2023, and consumer and business confidence did not recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a collapse in the property market. The public became more pessimistic about the future, citing structural inequality as the most important constraint on their ability to improve their quality of life

[12] Patel, A. (2024), Explainer: China's carbon market to cover steel, aluminium and cement in 2024. Available at: https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-chinas-carbon-market-to-cover-steel-aluminium-and-cement-in-2024

[13] International Energy Agency (2023), Renewable Energy Market Update (June).

[14] Shivaraman, S. (2024), China has an electric vehicle advantage, but can it maintain its edge? Available at: https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/china-electric-vehicle-advantage

[15] UNDP (2024), 2024 UNDP Trends Report: The Landscape of Development.

[16] Liu, S., Wang, Y., Ma, Z., Zou, C. Q., Zhou, L., (2024), China's International Climate-related Finance Provision and Mobilization for South-South Cooperation, Working Paper, World Resources Institute, Washington, DC, https://doi.org/10.46830/wriwp.24.00036

[17] World Resources Institute, www.wri.org

[18] International Monetary Fund, (2024), People's Republic of China: 2024 Article IV Consultation.

compared to factors such as education and ability.[19] The Chinese Government's large stimulus package introduced in Autumn 2024 provided a welcome boost to the property market, even if it is difficult to predict how it will affect long-term outcomes.[20]

Looking forward, China faces structural headwinds that include an ageing population as well as the cost of decarbonization. The IMF estimates that annual pension spending will increase by 9 percent of GDP from 2023 to 2052.[21] Population ageing and relaxation of China's one-child policy may increase the burden of unpaid care on women, whose contribution to this effort is approximately twice that of men, putting further progress on gender equality at risk.[22] China faces a major challenge in transitioning from its coal-based energy structure (representing 55.3 percent of total energy consumption),[23] with new coal-fired power stations still coming online and expected to remain part of the energy mix for decades. Tsinghua University researchers estimate that carbon neutrality will require an additional investment of approximately $13.9 to $19.2 trillion) in China's energy system over the next 30 years, or 2 to 2.5 percent of annual GDP every year over the period.[24] Decarbonization will require deep structural reform, with about 10 to 15 percent of China's jobs currently in industries (e.g., coal, heavy industry) that will be affected by the low-carbon transition.[25] Compounding this challenge, high carbon industry jobs are concentrated in less developed northern and western provinces.

Globally, anaemic growth due to the lingering effects of the pandemic, high inflation and debt are feeding into competition for resources, anti-globalization sentiments, systemic instabilities and geopolitical tensions. In this context, China's integration into global value chains and international institutions is a source of both strength and vulnerability.

China's size and economic weight makes it central to the resolution of global cross-border problems. In a geopolitical context characterized by uncertainty, insecurity and potential for greater fragmentation and disorder, the relationship between UNDP and China potentially takes on added significance as a platform for constructive cooperation and dialogue on how to address global development challenges.

1.4 UNDP in China

The United Nations Development Programme became China's first development cooperation partner in 1979 and will mark half a century of partnership with China during its next CPD. Its work over the last four decades tracked China's development story closely, shifting from that of a traditional donor to that of a partner within and beyond its national borders, including in its activities under the framework of South-South Cooperation.[26] In the space of 40 years, UNDP shifted from importing basic goods and technologies such as broccoli and computers to facilitating the sharing of technology and technical capacities to address challenges in other developing countries.[27] Key areas of focus and milestones in the partnership are illustrated in more detail in Annex 5.

[19] Alisky, M., Rozelle, S., Whyte, M.K. (2023), Getting Ahead in Today's China: From Optimism to Pessimism. Available at: https://sccei.fsi.stanford.edu/reap/publication/getting-ahead-todays-china-optimism-pessimism

[20] https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202409/25/content_WS66f3602ec6d0868f4e8eb3c0.html

[21] International Monetary Fund, (2024), People's Republic of China: 2024 Article IV Consultation.

[22] International Labour Organization and UN Women (2023), Care Work in China: Who Does Care Work? What Is its Economic Value and How Has it Been Affected by COVID-19? https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/cn-c383-231025-care-work-in-china-eng.pdf

[23] https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202402/content_6934935.htm

[24] Institute of Climate Change and Sustainable Development of Tsinghua University. Research on China's Long-term Low carbon Development Strategy and Transformation Path. *China's Population, Resources and Environment*, Volume 30, Issue 11, pp. 1-25, 2020.

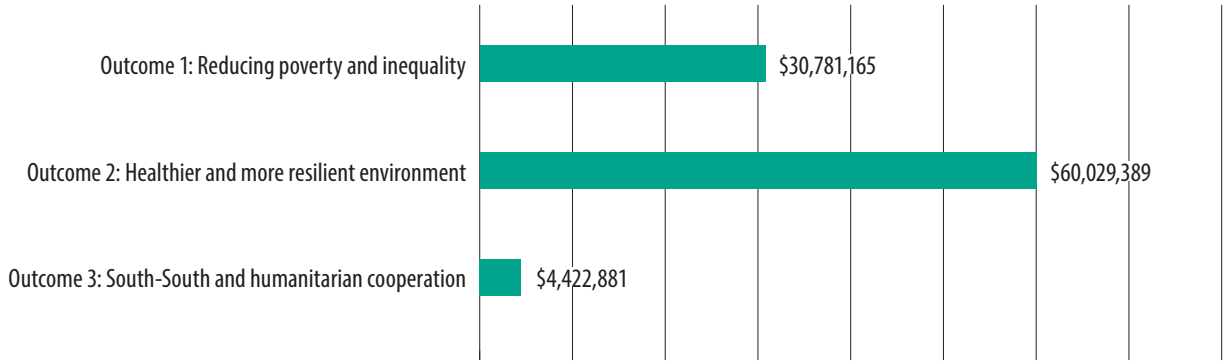
[25] World Bank (2022), China Country Climate and Development Report.

[26] United Nations (2024), The United Nations in China.

[27] China Global Television Network (2021), The Story of UNDP China: From Bringing in Broccoli to Spreading Growth.

UNDP's Country Programme Document (CPD) anticipated a budget of $205 million for the period, or about 16 percent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework budget for the period. UNDP frames its contribution under three outcomes: (1) Reducing poverty and inequality; (2) A healthier and more resilient environment; and (3) South-South and humanitarian cooperation (Figure 1). As of September 2024, expenditure over the course of the CPD period was less than half ($95 million) the CPD target due to lower than expected delivery in Outcomes 1 and 2, partly as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on project implementation. Outcome 3 is relatively small but strategically important given China's emergence as a source of development finance and a rich laboratory of lessons on development. Most activities under Outcomes 1 and 2 also have an emphasis on South-South cooperation.

FIGURE 1. Expenditure by outcome, 2021-2024 (Millions US$)

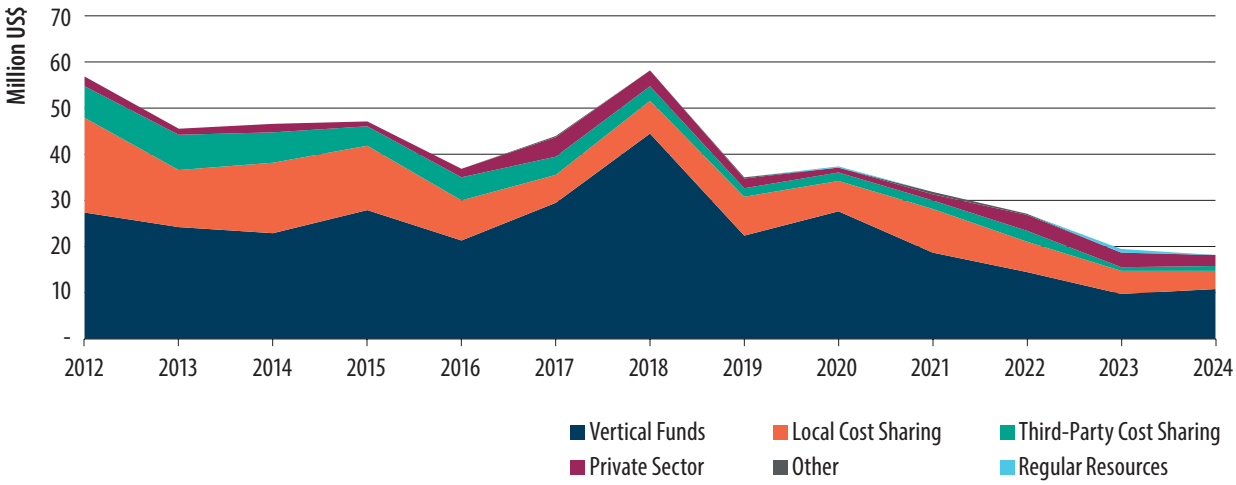


Source: UNDP Atlas/Quantum, September 2024

China's economic success precipitated a structural decline in resourcing across all sources, which is reflected in Figure 2. China's graduation to upper middle-income status in 2020 means that UNDP regular resource allocations are now negligible. Traditional donors ceased bilateral development assistance programs to China in the early 2010s, as reflected in the decline in third-party cost sharing. Private contributions were a consistent but fluctuating feature of the resource mix for the last decade. Delivery of private sector funding in the last five years ranged between $1.5 million in 2020 and $5 million in 2022, with UNDP delivering assistance that drew on support from over 30 private partners. UNDP did well to become a key implementer of finance from vertical environmental trust funds, delivering just over a third of completed GEF projects and 25.5 percent of GEF finance and mobilizing 23 percent of total co-financing contributions. Vertical funds are a critical component of Country Office financing, accounting for over half of all expenditure in this CPD period despite declining GEF allocations to China over the last decade.[28] Government financing for UNDP operations also declined over the last decade from above $10 million in the early 2010s to around $5 million in recent years and accounted for around 25 percent of expenditure in the current Country Programme.

[28] Allocations to China in the most recent replenishment (GEF8, 2022–2026) were less than half what they were in GEF4 (2006-2010). This resulted from increases in GEF floor allocations, which have lifted the share received by least-developed (LDC) and small countries as well as reductions in ceilings, which have reduced allocations to top recipient countries. China's share of GEF funding was also affected by a reduction in the global allocation to climate change from $1,088 million in GEF5 to $524 million in GEF8, which disproportionately affected China given its large share of this component of GEF funding.

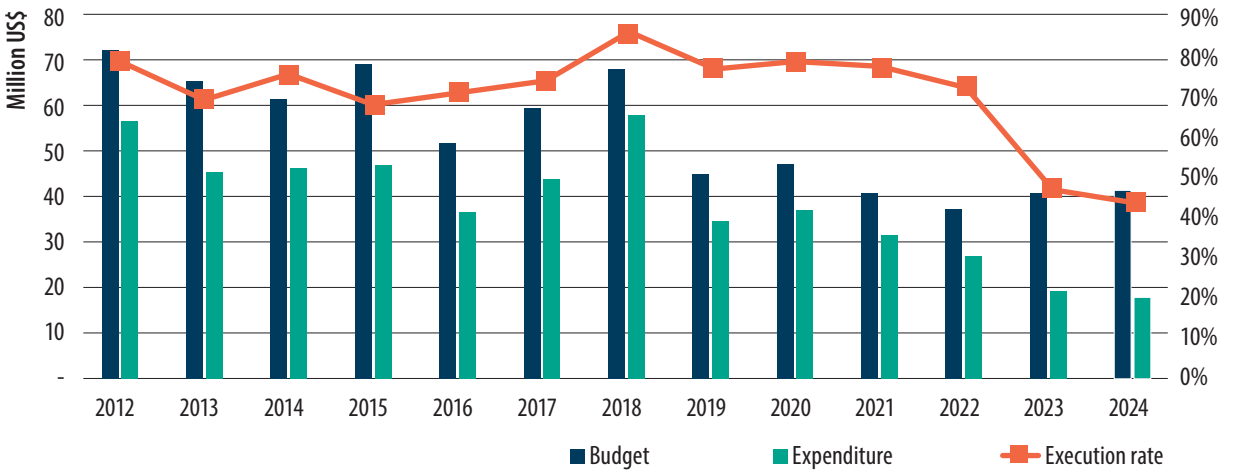
FIGURE 2. UNDP annual expenditure by source of funding, 2012–2024 (at current prices)



Source: UNDP Atlas/Quantum, September 2024

Structural pressures were exacerbated in this CPD by COVID-19, which caused delays and cancellations of activities due to lockdowns, travel restrictions and overstretched local governments being tasked with implementing response measures. As can be seen in Figure 3, UNDP struggled to lift delivery following the removal of COVID restrictions in December 2022.[29]

FIGURE 3. Programme budget, expenditure and execution rate, 2012-2024

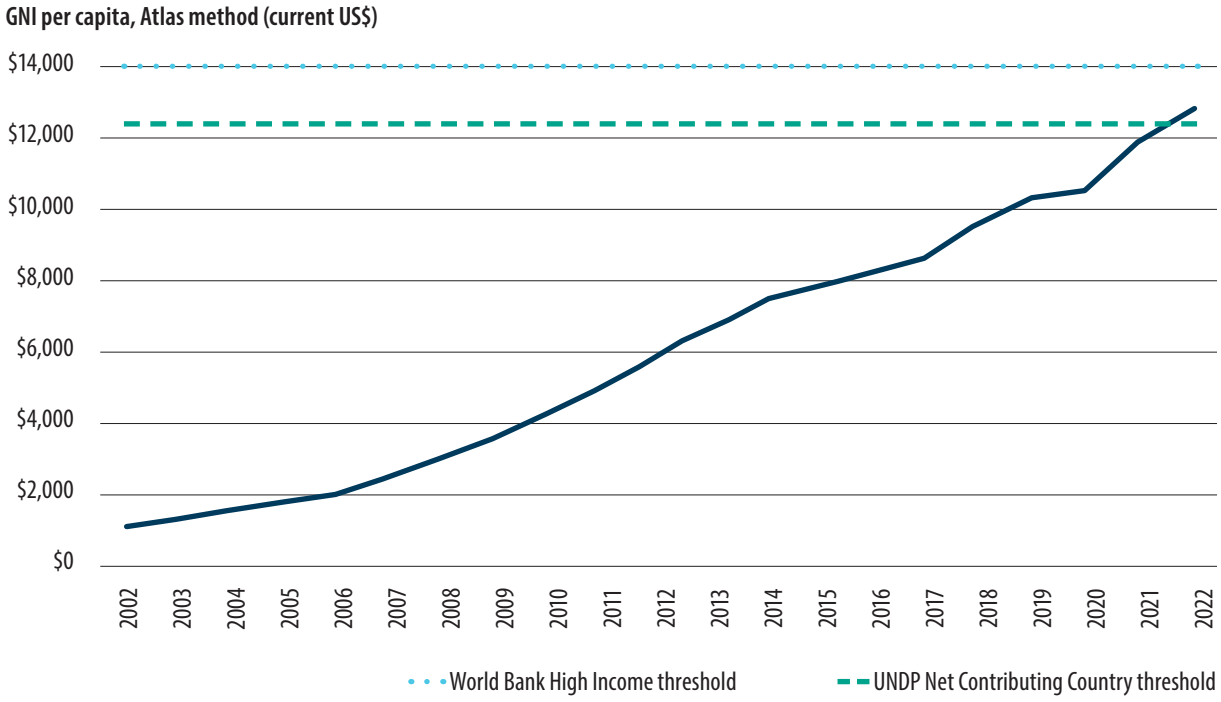


Source: UNDP Atlas/Quantum, September 2024

[29] Post-pandemic delivery challenges are explained in UNDP/Office of Audit and Investigations (2024), Audit of UNDP Country Office in China.

Looking forward, there is a reasonable prospect that China will become a high-income and UNDP net contributor country in the period covered by its next CPD, potentially accentuating resourcing pressures and increasing expectations on China contributions (Figure 4).[30] For example, the Republic of Korea became the major funder of UNDP's country programme in that country when its per capita GDP reached the level of China today in real terms. Five years later, the Republic of Korea became the sole funder of UNDP operations.[31]

FIGURE 4. China per capita GNI, 2002–2022 and key development status thresholds



Source: World Bank

At the time of the ICPE, the Country Office employed 86 persons: three international and 17 national staff, 27 Personnel Service Agreement contract holders and 30 United Nations Volunteers (project based). UNDP also employed nine full-time interns to help with various functions in the Office.

[30] Net contributor countries are countries with a four-year average per capita GNI greater than $12,475. They are not eligible to receive TRAC-1 resources and are expected to fully fund local office costs.

[31] Republic of Korea, Ministry for Education, Science and Training, (2009), The Republic of Korea and the United Nations Development Programme.

CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

This chapter assesses UNDP's contributions to the CPD outcomes, outputs and cross-cutting issues.

2.1 Reducing Poverty and Inequality

Finding 1. Mainstreaming Sustainable Development Goals: UNDP supported local governments to review and align policies with the SDGs and organized knowledge-sharing forums. These reviews enriched the presentation of local SDG progress and implementation at the local level in China, providing a lens for international audiences to understand China's practices and experiences and a potential basis for attracting investment.

Since UNDP developed the first SDG progress assessment methodology for Chinese cities in 2019, it supported completion of assessments covering 15 Chinese cities and districts, including three national SDG demonstration zones.[32] UNDP helped Yangzhou to complete the first voluntary prefectural city-level SDG review and is now supporting Suzhou New District and Chenzhou in following suit. Additional plans and knowledge products on a variety of topics informed local debate and decision-making.[33] Tools such as the implement Green and Low-carbon Technology Transfer and Conversion Platform are contributing to local government and industry efforts to green supply chains.[34]

UNDP was active in supporting events and exchanges, fostering peer learning and the dissemination of knowledge. Examples include support for the World Tourism City Forum (2023) and the World Canal City Sustainable Development Forum (2022, 2023), both of which involved participation from over 100 cities in China and abroad. Events in the Yangtze River Delta attracted over 1,300 on-site participants and engaged another 200,000 online, focusing on a range of topics, including green tech innovation, manufacturing sector energy efficiency, carbon-zero tech, carbon emissions tracking, industrial coordination, the European Union Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, and Sino-Italy and Sino-France sustainable development cooperation. Collectively, these enriched policy debate and discussion at the local level, with particular emphasis on green transformation.

Aligned to the Chinese Government's greening agenda and UNDP's ambitious sustainable finance agenda, there is strong potential for UNDP to solidify partnerships with major Chinese cities to contribute to the process of transformation. China's commitment to establish 10 Innovation Demonstration Zones for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an opening and platform for future subnational partnerships.

Finding 2. Economic Development, Poverty and Inequality: UNDP partnered with the Chinese Government and a variety of stakeholders to pursue diverse solutions to economic development and employment and reducing multidimensional poverty. Efforts produced tangible benefits and informed Chinese Government policy and practice.

[32] The Chinese City SDG Assessment Index evaluates SDG progress for 90 provincial capitals and major sub-provincial cities using data from on 37 of the 232 SDG indicators and encompassing 16 of the 17 SDGs (except SDG 14, Life Below Water). Evaluation of each city's progress was conducted using an implementation progress assessment and a target gap assessment, identifying gaps remaining on the road to meeting the respective 2030 targets. See: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-06/%5BENG%5D%20Summary%20report%20-%20Chinese%20Cities%20SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Eng%20final_updated.pdf

[33] For example, on Green Industry Development, Women's Participation in Sustainable Development and Rural Revitalisation and on the impact of COVID-19 in different locations.

[34] Launched in September 2023, the platform is a collaborative effort with the Green Technology Bank under the Ministry of Science and Technology. Funded by the government and freely accessible by stakeholders, it includes an extensive repository of resources: over 9,500 pieces of technology linked to a nationwide green tech platform, more than 2,300 solution packages and 300+ targeted technologies tailored to meet specific demands.

Since 2007, UNDP's Water Programme evolved from a single project to an umbrella programme covering 21 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions on a variety of approaches to improving water resource management. Programme estimates include large numbers of beneficiaries as well as significant ecological, economic and social benefits, with a record of innovation, community participation, technology transfer and replication.[35] The Water Programme played a positive role in China and local governments' water-related policies and practices, including access to clean water and sanitation for hard-to-access communities, water conservation techniques, nature-based solutions and controlling pollution. Water Management Demonstration training bases were established to promote water management technologies, models and methods by facilitating exchanges between China and the Global South.

UNDP maintained its longstanding (since 1994) focus on microfinance, working with four rural counties to support Medium to Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) in agricultural techniques, digital and financial literacy and access to finance. Working with Duxiaoman Technologies in Gutian County of Fujian Province, UNDP helped set up a digital platform that enabled partner financial institutions to lend $32.6 million to 830 households. A similar platform in Youyang County of Chongqing Province registered 16 financial institutions and issued $1.07 million in credit loans to 376 MSMEs and farmers' cooperatives since its launch in October 2023. Since 2022, UNDP organized an annual event to promote an enabling policy environment for MSMEs and place them at the centre of the public agenda. Local credit unions were supported to achieve significant increases in coverage and services.

UNDP worked with United Nations Volunteers, the Soong Ching Ling Foundation and the Soon Ching Ling Science and Culture Centre for Young People to raise awareness about the SDGs and foster personal growth and skills development.[36] This included activities such as a grant for over 300 youth-led start-ups, an SDG Academy, which brought together over 400 stakeholders and trained over 100,000 young people, and an International Platform for Volunteering, which trained more than 1,000 young people. Flagship national and regional events such as the annual Asia-Pacific Forum on Youth Leadership, Innovation and Entrepreneurship provided networks for collective learning and experience-sharing between countries and amplified youth voices on key policy challenges they face. UNDP worked with United Nations Volunteers and the Beijing Volunteer Federation to promote volunteer service in Beijing. In 2020, more than 18,000 volunteers were trained for the Beijing Winter Olympics , continuing the UN's long history of engagement in volunteering in China, including the prominent role it played in supporting China's hosting of the 2008 Summer Games.

UNDP is supporting policymakers in better understanding the impact of the transition on different sectors and to identify the most affected people and regions for targeted policy interventions. UNDP developed two reports on the Just Transition: one examining the employment impact of energy transition on key sectors at national level, the other looking at impact at subnational level, particularly in Shanxi Province. Following the release of the first report, UNDP was recognized as a key player on this topic and was invited to several events on the Just Transition organized by different entities such as Agora and the Natural Resources Defense Council and is building credibility as a trusted voice in this area.

[35] UNDP (2021), Water Program: Fifteen Years of Practice in China—From Visible Outcomes to Deep Structural Reforms and Impacts.

[36] UNDP China (2023), The Innovative Demonstration Project on Promoting Youth Participation in Sustainable Development and Building a Community with Shared Future for Mankind Mid-term Evaluation Report.

UNDP maintained a focus on supporting vulnerable groups in rural areas. For example, the SDG Village Pilot Project in Yunnan Province revived local traditional arts and cultures to enhance tourism, helping hundreds of ethnic Yi women diversify their incomes beyond agricultural sales.[37] UNDP's work in Zhouqu, an impoverished county in Gansu Province, to build its resilience to natural disasters and diversify local livelihoods is another example.

While urban poverty and social protection were flagged as focal areas in the CPD, this was not a significant focus and is not a strength of UNDP's work in China, reflecting lack of funding opportunities and the Chinese Government's partnership preferences in these areas.

Finding 3. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: UNDP serves as an important international platform for information circulation and advocacy on the rights of vulnerable groups, including sexual minorities, creating space and capacity for key stakeholders to mobilize, advocate and contribute to policy dialogue on inclusion. UNDP's role as an alternative, trusted and careful advocate on diversity and inclusion was important.

UNDP efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and HIV status focused on increasing access to employment opportunities, enhancing workplace inclusion and diversity, reducing barriers for transgender individuals to gender-confirming surgery and legal recognition and increasing their access to social services. This included a partnership with UNAIDS and ILO, which rely on UNDP's extensive community and private sector partners network to engage in health rights advocacy and workplace inclusion and who would be less effective in China without UNDP's contributions. These partnerships supported at least 20 community-based organizations across China to provide rights-based training for hundreds of pro bono lawyers, offering legal support to tens of thousands of community members served by these groups and winning milestone legal cases representing community members against employment discrimination and conversion therapy.[38]

As a co-sponsor of the Joint UN Programme on AIDS with UNAIDS and ILO, UNDP helped make China's efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination an integral part of the global movement for mainstreaming the rights of HIV+ community members and sexual minorities. Media advocacy for societal acceptance of these communities reached millions through sensitization campaigns and communication products aimed at providing equality of opportunities, rights and entitlements for marginalized groups.[39]

During the last CPD, UNDP was able to play a more active role in promoting the rights of sexual minorities than under the current one.[40] Maintaining this line of work became more challenging under the current CPD due to: i) reduced external funding, and ii) opportunities for civil society organizations to work in this space.[41]

[37] UNDP (2022), Piloting SDG Localization at the village Level Impact Report – Phase 1 (2017-2021), https://www.undp.org/china/publications/piloting-sdg-localization-village-level-impact-report-phase-1-2017-2021

[38] UNDP internal reporting.

[39] According to UNDP's estimates, 1,270,000 individuals were reached between 2021 and 2023.

[40] For example, in the last CPD, the Country Office was able to support three legislative bills related to gender information before the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference meetings for deliberation. See UNDP/IEO (2019) China ICPE, p. 17.

[41] Various UN/UNAIDS publications alluded to the general shrinking civic space in this respect. For one of the latest UN reports, see Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations on the Ninth Periodic Report of China, 31 May 2023, paras. 35-36.

2.2 Environment

Finding 4. Biodiversity: UNDP was the leading implementer of GEF biodiversity support in China from the outset of GEF financing for biodiversity in 1994, with numerous examples of UNDP-GEF making strong contributions to China's biodiversity protection outcomes.

UNDP-GEF support under the current CPD focused on improving the protection and quality of wetland, terrestrial and marine ecosystems as well as agricultural biodiversity.

China's progress in biodiversity conservation through protected areas over the last two decades was strong, establishing more than 11,800 protected areas covering over 18 percent of its land area[42] and nearly 30 percent of national key protected wildlife species in these areas.[43] UNDP estimates that it was directly involved in China's designation of around 7.56 million hectares of new and improved protected areas in the past five years, covering around 0.8 percent of China's land area and maintaining China's strong progress in protecting biodiversity.[44]

This included efforts to establish a robust network of protected wetlands across China, underpinning both local and global benefits given China's importance as a habitat for migratory waterbirds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. In the Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve, the evaluation team directly observed a strong local example of conservation efforts. These resulted in a twofold increase in the diversity of bird species documented in the reserve from the early 1990s as well as significant increases in the local population status of targeted globally-threatened migratory waterbird species over baselines established in 2018-2019.[45]

Marine conservation efforts supported cross-border cooperation between China and the Republic of Korea to reduce the decline in biological resources and restore depleted fish stocks in the Yellow Sea. From 1992 onwards, UNDP-GEF engaged in a cooperative effort that reduced fishing pressure in China (22 percent) and the Republic of Korea (17 percent), created an additional 207,000 hectares in marine protected areas, scaled up integrated multi-trophic aquaculture, improved water quality and reduced harmful algal blooms and increased catch per unit efforts in project sites.[46] As a result of small grants to local NGOs and community-based organisations, UNDP reported positive changes on marine conservation issues such as recycling fishing nets and marine plastic waste and improved accuracy in household waste classification.

UNDP worked to reverse the decline in China's globally significant agricultural biodiversity as one of the world's eight centres of crop origin and the source of more than 130 of the world's crop species.[47] In Hubei, Chongqing and Hainan provinces, UNDP worked with farmers and provincial and national stakeholders to protect globally significant indigenous agricultural products and reverse the steep decline in genetic diversity. For example, local rice varieties planted by farmers fell from over 46,000 in the 1950s to slightly over 1,000 in 2006.[48] UNDP is providing valued support to Chinese authorities and farmers to promote and incentivize the breeding, processing and marketing of species important to the global goal of preserving agricultural genetic resources.

---

42 Li, B.V., Pimm, S L, How China expanded its protected areas to conserve biodiversity, Current Biology, Volume 30, Issue 22, 2020.

43 White Paper on Biodiversity Conservation in China (2021), https://www.forestry.gov.cn/main/72/20211009/081104837500072.html

44 Country Office estimates.

45 Yellow River Conservancy Commission of the Ministry of Water Resources, 2024. http://www.yrcc.gov.cn/xwdt/lylw/202406/t20240627_432911.html

46 UNDP, GEF (2022), The Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Story: Management and Governance for the Restoration and Protection of the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem.

47 Global Environment Facility (2014), The GEF-6 Biodiversity Strategy.

48 Including rouge rice (Oryza sative), Wudang Tao tea (Eurya alata), black goat (Capra hircus), Shanlan rice (Oryza sativa), Wuzhishan pig (Sus scrofa) and Jiaji duck (Anas domestica).

UNDP supported China's experimentation with financial solutions and incentive mechanisms for biodiversity protection, with some notable results in Shanghai and Guizhou.[49]

For example, UNDP supported China as it strengthened its global leadership of the biodiversity agenda with its maiden turn as President for the Conference of the Parties to Ramsar (COP14) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), at which it committed $209 million to establish the Kunming Biodiversity Fund.[50]

Finding 5. Climate Mitigation: UNDP was a key partner in China's drive to meet its climate policy objectives. With seven projects in diverse sectors, UNDP supports new technologies and policy insights. China's status as a major CO2 emitter makes it a vital testing ground for global energy transformation, enhancing the value of UNDP's work.

UNDP supported China in the development of its National Communications under the Paris Agreement, including work on China's fourth National Communication, which was submitted at the end of 2023.[51] UNDP supported China in improving energy efficiency in domestic markets[52] and public buildings by adopting energy-saving and low-carbon technologies.[53] UNDP supported China in experimenting with biomass, solar, energy-saving and energy storage technologies through demonstration villages in Beijing, Hebei, Shanxi, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Sichuan, Yunnan and Ningxia provinces.[54] UNDP supported China in experimenting with greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation in the agricultural sector, with a focus on introducing conservation tillage approaches that will keep carbon in the soil. UNDP is supporting China in adopting low carbon and energy efficient technologies in the phosphate chemicals industry, which produced about 59 million tons of CO2 equivalent in 2019,[55] a level that would rank the industry in the top 50 if it were a country.[56]

UNDP continued over 20 years of support for China's hydrogen industry, including the establishment of China's first Hydrogen Town in Rugao City.[57] UNDP also promoted the development of hydrogen energy through vocational training studies and the establishment of the National Hydrogen Energy Vehicle Research and Testing Public Service Platform. This helped strengthen the hydrogen energy industry, with the participation of more than 160 enterprises and the creation of job opportunities. However, the initial plan to focus on renewable hydrogen production and commercialization research was not realized due to changes in local government priorities and regulations. As a result, the project shifted its focus to the establishment of a testing centre for fuel cell vehicles, which increased technical capacity but limited the exploration of renewable hydrogen solutions.[58]

Finding 6. Pollutants: UNDP was a key implementing agent for finance allocated to China under the Stockholm Convention, the Minamata Convention and the Montreal Protocol, helping to speed up the process of transformation in target industries by facilitating access to improved technologies, formulating norms and regulations and conducting applied research for responsible government agencies. With finance

[49] In Shanghai, green finance regulations now incorporate biodiversity criteria, while in Guizhou, the Provincial Financial Supervision and Administration Bureau has committed to investing $2.9 million to develop biodiversity finance solutions in the Fanjing Mountain area.

[50] China sets Kunming Biodiversity Fund to support biodiversity conservation in developing countries (www.gov.cn)

[51] China submits the Fourth National Communication on Climate Change of the People's Republic of China Third Biennial Update Report on Climate Change in the People's Republic of China, 2023. https://www.mee.gov.cn/xxgk/hjyw/202312/t20231229_1060290.shtml

[52] UNDP-GEF, Enabling Solid State Lighting Market Transformation & Promotion of Light Emitting Diode Lighting.

[53] UNDP-GEF, China Public Building Energy Efficiency Improvement Project.

[54] UNDP-GEF, China Zero Carbon Village and Town Promotion Project.

[55] UNDP GEF, Facilitating Cleaner and Energy Efficient Phosphate Chemicals Industry in China.

[56] Crippa, M., Guizzardi, D., Banja, M., Solazzo, E., Muntean, M., Schaaf, E., Pagani, F., Monforti-Ferrario, F., Olivier, J.G. J., Quadrelli, R., Grassi, G., Rossi, S., Oom, D., Branco, A., San-Miguel, J., Vignati, E. CO2 emissions of all world countries: 2022 Report, EUR 31182 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, http://doi.org/10.2760/07904

[57] Hydrogen Economy Pilot.

[58] UNDP China Hydrogen Economy Pilot Project in China: Final Evaluation Report.

mobilized under these conventions, China fulfilled its convention-related obligations and commitments to protect human health and the environment by eliminating or reducing harmful pollutants. This was central to the success of the Montreal Protocol given that China is the world's largest source of ODS emissions.

UNDP is the leading agency for China's implementation of the Montreal Protocol, playing a key role in providing coordinating support to the World Bank, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, the United Nations Environment Programme and other partners on protocol matters. UNDP worked closely with the Chinese Government on more than 190 projects since the protocol was established and is currently supporting China's phasing out of hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC) in the solvent sector and in the industrial and commercial refrigeration and air-conditioning sector. Notwithstanding disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, both interventions are expected to meet or exceed their targets.[59]

Since joining the Montreal Protocol in 1991, China fulfilled its obligations and commitments, eliminating approximately 628,000 tons of ozone-depleting substances (ODSs) and avoiding approximately 26 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (more than double the country's emissions in 20223).[60] Given that China's HCFC production and consumption account for a very large share of global ODSs,[61] its success was fundamental to the success of the Montreal Protocol and important for global progress on curbing GHG emissions.

Under the current CPD, UNDP executed three projects in China to meet its commitments under the Stockholm Convention to reduce persistent organic pollutants such as dioxins in the recycled non-ferrous metal industry.[62] In support of China's 2019 ban on the toxic pesticide endosulfan,[63] biological control and alternative technologies in cotton pest management were used, covering 3,000 hectares at demonstration sites.[64] Reductions in dioxin emissions achieved through support for demonstration enterprises in the recycled copper sector exceeded expectations, with resultant standards integrated into the national emissions permit system covering a majority of non-ferrous metal enterprises in China.[65] Under the Minamata Convention, UNDP is supporting China in increasing the acceptance of mercury-free devices in healthcare facilities and among the general public and in laying the foundations for the application and promotion of mercury-free medical devices in advance of its 2026 ban on the production of mercury-containing thermometers and sphygmomanometers.[66]

2.3 South-South and Humanitarian Cooperation

Finding 7. Portfolio Relevance and Quality: UNDP China's priorities and portfolio of work supporting South-South and triangular cooperation are well aligned with national and global priorities. UNDP maintained and built on positive relationships with key government agencies and other actors in the context of increasingly challenging geopolitical dynamics.

59 UNDP project progress reports.

60 https://www.mee.gov.cn/ywdt/hjywnews/202212/t20221205_1006940.shtml

61 The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that in 2019, China's HCFC production and consumption accounted for 86.7 percent and 60.3 percent, respectively, of the global ozone depletion potential (ODP)-weighted total.

62 Phase-out of Endosulfan; Secondary Copper; Green Production and Sustainable Development in Secondary Aluminium, Lead, Zinc and Lithium Sectors in China.

63 Zhou, S., Zhang, Y., Wang, J. et al., Endosulfan residues and farmers' replacement behaviors of endosulfan in the northwest inland cotton region, Frontiers of Environmental and Scientific Engineering, Volume 18, Issue 43, 2024. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11783-024-1803-8

64 Terminal Evaluation Report of UNDP-GEF Project on Phase-out of Endosulfan in China.

65 UNDP-GEF, 2021, UPOPs Reduction through BAT/BEP and PPP-based Industry Chain Management in Secondary Copper Production Sector in China: Terminal Evaluation Report.

66 UNDP-GEF project document: Demonstration of production phase-out of mercury-containing medical thermometers and sphygmomanometers and promoting the application of mercury-free alternatives in medical facilities in China.

UNDP's South-South Cooperation (SSC) and humanitarian portfolio was a small but strategically important part of its work in China since the early 2010s.[67] UNDP built on relationships developed since China's earliest efforts to contribute to international development more than a decade ago. UNDP's SSC work is well aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and strong global SSC mandate[68] and is one of the UN agencies in China that most actively contributes to Outcome 6.[69]

At a time of heightened international competition and geopolitical divides, UNDP played most of the typical roles expected of it: that of partnership builder, convenor, advocate, analyst and knowledge broker.[70] UNDP China maintained a network of over 20 partnerships with government agencies, academic institutions and development partners, with a limited budget of $3.2 million for this work in China. Most of these partnerships were initiated a decade or more ago, before the current CPD, indicating continuity in needs and priorities.

Major stakeholders in China continue to express strong appreciation for the value of UNDP's work in strengthening China's contributions to global development. China's Ministry of Commerce praised the constructive role of UNDP in the evolution of China's international development policies as well as in its cooperation with countries in the Global South and North. The China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges wants stronger cooperation between UNDP and China in supporting development initiatives in the Global South. The China International Development Cooperation Agency emphasized the importance of UNDP as one of its most important global partners in its efforts to advance China's international development reach and impact. South-South and triangular cooperation was much more highly valued by partners in China in the 2020 partnership survey than in other country offices.

Finding 8. South-South and Triangular Cooperation Activities: UNDP is providing useful support for South-South Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) in different and complementary ways, leveraging its global network, its technical expertise as a major development organization and its neutrality. Drawing on these strands, UNDP is in a good position to broker and shape the development of a new global consensus on effective development.

China is demonstrating its growing value proposition for SSC by providing development finance, advanced technologies and development experiences, thus encouraging global learning from the Chinese experience. As a major new actor in global development cooperation and member of the Global South, China comes with its own unique perspective and approaches that differ from conventions established by institutions such as OECD. Being a relatively new actor, China's approaches, policies and systems are evolving but are also potentially influential in spaces that would benefit from fresh ideas and improvement. As a neutral, independent and respected development actor, UNDP is in a strong position to facilitate productive global cooperation and learning from this experience. Examples of where this played out over the past few years are reviewed below.

---

67 UNDP IEO (2019) Independent Country Programme Evaluation.

68 (i) Specific development challenges addressed through South-South and triangular cooperation; (ii) Strengthened institutional, human and technical capacities in countries of the South; (iii) Enhanced integration of South perspectives and needs into global and regional policies and international development cooperation; (iv) Improved exchanges of experiences, know-how and development solutions; (v) Resources and expertise mobilized through SSTC partnerships and strategic alliances; (vi) Increased impact of South-South cooperation as an important element of international cooperation for sustainable development.

69 "Through South-South cooperation and humanitarian cooperation, China makes greater contributions to SDG attainment and the principles of the 2030 Agenda, including leaving no one behind." According to the UN in China 2023 Annual Country Results Report, 13 UN agencies are reported to have supported the mobilization of approximately $115 million in SSC funding (primarily from the GDF) to assist 85 partner countries. In 2024, there were 8 ongoing and 4 completed GDF-funded UNDP projects, valued at around $22 million and supporting 11, largely low-income countries in Asia and Africa.

70 https://unsouthsouth.org/2023/12/08/guidelines-for-the-integration-of-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation-into-the-country-and-regional-level-work-of-the-united-nations-development-system

UNDP had a consistent focus on convening and facilitating discussion and exchange within China and between China and the Global North on development cooperation approaches, definitions and methodologies.[71] Still at an early stage but with significant potential is a multi-year project launched with the EU and aimed at advancing China's international development capacities while also providing an opportunity for China's insights and experiences to influence the sector.

UNDP acted as a broker and convenor of discussions and cooperation between China and the Global South. One example is the China-Africa-UN Transformative Partnership Initiative co-created by the UN system, the Chinese Government, member states (including the African Ambassadors' Group in China), the development community, academic institutions, foundations and the private sector to implement outcomes from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). UNDP contributed to the conceptualization of the Transformative Partnership Initiative and the convening of several policy dialogues, including the latest event on the Nairobi Declaration in partnership with the Embassy of Kenya. UNDP sent technical staff to join the United Nations' China task force led by the Resident Coordinator's Office. UNDP also provided advice on sensitive issues such as debt restructuring by producing a detailed analysis of the potential use of debt repurposing as a vehicle for supporting nature and the SDGs.

UNDP supported China in developing policies, systems and capacities for international engagement and cooperation. For example UNDP supported the development and optimization of project management information systems, application processes and evaluation policies of the Global Development Fund (GDF) and South-South Cooperation Fund, a key source of grant finance for the implementation of China's commitment to supporting countries around the globe in achieving the SDGs through its Global Development Initiative. UNDP continued its efforts to strengthen the capacity of Chinese civil society organizations and the private sector to engage effectively in developing countries.

Documenting and sharing lessons from China's development experience was another area of focus through events such as a good practice exchange organized with the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation (CAITEC) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) at the Fourth China and International Development Forum on how to leverage global development partnerships to advance the SDGs, sharing good practices on poverty alleviation and rural development at the Third CELAC-China Forum on Poverty Reduction and Development Promotion organized with the International Poverty Reduction Center in China (IPRCC) and the 2024 National Evaluation Capacities Conference organized by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office and the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA). Among other outcomes, 14 briefings, toolkits and guidelines were produced to inform SDG-aligned development cooperation.

UNDP and UNOPS in collaboration with other UN agencies, including the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, WFP, and FAO, supported the training of 500 small and medium-sized enterprises and women-owned businesses in sustainable practices, integrating environmental sustainability into procurement processes and promoting green travel to reduce GHG emissions. This partnership facilitated the registration of Chinese companies on the United Nations Global Marketplace, allowing them to access UN procurement opportunities with uncertain impact on value for financial or procurement outcomes.[72]

---

[71] The project established a platform to facilitate knowledge exchange for wider dissemination and provided access to the best practices and lessons learned from GDF projects for peer-to-peer learning. The GDF Best Practice Brochure II, Best Practice and Experience Exchange Workshop on the GDF Project Management and online capacity building events exemplified the importance of knowledge exchange, which can guide and inform initiatives regarding China's development cooperation institutions and UN and international partners to scale up the contributions of SSC towards the SDGs.

[72] According to the Annual Statistical Report on United Nations Procurement, in 2023, UN organizations directly procured $327.6 million worth of goods and services in China, accounting for 1.3 percent of UN procurement. China ranked 21st among UN global suppliers. The number of Chinese suppliers registered on the platform increased from 6,923 in 2019 to 9,851 in 2023 but did not translate into an increase in China's ranking or volume of supply to the UN. Although there was a spike in UN procurement from Chinese suppliers from 2020 to 2022 related to the pandemic, procurement from China reverted to the historical norm in 2023. See: https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/asr_data_country

Despite these promising initiatives, it is not possible to have a strong sense of progress towards Outcome 3. Internal reporting does not capture the value UNDP is bringing (or should bring). Collected numbers under the CPD results framework add little value for either accountability or learning purposes, especially in the absence of a dedicated evaluation. The potential for impact is also reduced by the delivery of this body of work through a set of disparate partnerships and associated activities rather than a more coherent, strategic portfolio approach. However, the evaluation team recognizes that this reflects the reality of UNDP's funding and operating model and that there is not much the Country Office can do to address this.

Finding 9. Positioning as Partner in Support of Development in the Global South: UNDP's position as a partner in supporting development progress in the Global South with China is still developing. UNDP is one of only a few major UN agencies that have not capitalized on China's emergence as a globally significant source of official development assistance and other development finance. UNDP's China Country Office plays an important role in shaping the evolution of UNDP's relationship with China as a partner in global development but is not resourced accordingly.

Reflecting its increased economic weight and emergence as an important aid donor, China is playing an increasingly prominent role in the United Nations system, including through its financial contributions. During a period when China's development finance expanded substantially, China's contributions to UNDP globally and to the Country Office were flat over the last decade. According to data collected by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, UNDP is one of just three of the largest thirteen UN organizations that did not increase revenues from China over the last decade (Figure 5). In part, this reflects the fact that the largest growth in China's contributions to the United Nations was in the form of mandatory assessed contributions, which are not the basis for UNDP membership. However, most UN agencies were also successful in mobilizing increased voluntary (core and non-core) contributions from China, which was not the case for UNDP (Figure 6). This is a key corporate issue for UNDP given the limited success it had in diversifying the partner countries upon which it depends for flexible funding.[73]

[73] UNDP (2024), A UNDP Business Model for the Future? The Case for Evolution. (Internal Working Paper).

FIGURE 5. United Nations revenue from China, 2013 to 2022

UN Organisation	Revenue in millions US$ 2013-17	Revenue in millions US$ 2018-22	Trend	Variance	
UN-DPO	2,969.2	4,789.2		↑	61%
UN-Secretariat	1,047.2	1,857.4		↑	77%
WHO	153.3	334.1		↑	118%
FAO	135.5	288.4		↑	113%
IAEA	123.3	260.9		↑	112%
UNESCO	130.3	238.5		↑	83%
ILO	105.0	218.0		↑	108%
IFAD	67.0	144.0		↑	115%
WFP	120.3	113.3		→	-6%
WTO	92.0	109.5		→	19%
UNDP	101.5	105.0		→	3%
UNIDO	49.4	102.3		↑	107%
ICAO	29.7	49.3		↑	66%
Other	177.0	488.1		↑	176%
Total	**5,300.5**	**9,097.9**		↑	**72%**

Source: UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, Financial Statistics | United Nations, CEB (unsceb.org)

FIGURE 6. United Nations revenue from China, 2013 to 2022 by contribution type

Org./ Category	Contribution type	Revenue in millions US$ 2013-17	Revenue in millions US$ 2018-22	Trend	Variance	
UN-DPO	Assessed contributions	2,969.2	4,789.2		↑	61%
Other UN	Assessed contributions	1,565.1	3,452.4		↑	121%
	Voluntary non-core (earmarked) contributions	558.3	568.2		→	2%
	Voluntary core (un-earmarked) contributions	106.3	182.5		↑	72%
	Revenue from other activities	0.0	0.6		N/A	
UNDP	Voluntary non-core (earmarked) contributions	81.7	83.3		→	2%
	Voluntary core (un-earmarked) contributions	19.9	20.0		→	1%
	Revenue from other activities	0.0	1.7		N/A	

Source: UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, Financial Statistics | United Nations - CEB (unsceb.org)

While China's financial contribution to UNDP remained stable, there was a change in its composition, which shifted from China using UNDP complementing in support of its own domestic development agenda to working with UNDP to pursue outcomes in other countries, a shift that could be significant, if sustained. Examples include small Chinese-funded investments in mostly disaster-related projects in Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh (flood response), Dominica and Antigua & Barbuda (Hurricanes Maria and Irma), and

Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique (Cyclone Idai) implemented by the relevant UNDP country offices in partner countries. The establishment of new early-warning system initiatives covering six countries currently being developed with China provides an opportunity to establish a more structured long-term corporate partnership with China through which to face development challenges in the region and globally.

The UNDP office in China plays an important role in supporting and facilitating UNDP's engagements with China, including by acting as an interface between other country offices and Chinese authorities on funding opportunities. Though this is not traditional work for a UNDP country office, given China's global importance as a development partner, it is an important contribution to UNDP's corporate objectives. As was noted by the 2019 ICPE, there are strong arguments for why this work should be backed with dedicated resourcing rather than absorbed by the Country Office as is currently the case.[74]

2.4 Cross-cutting Issues

Finding 10. UNDPs Value Proposition: Notwithstanding disruptions caused by the global pandemic, UNDP's partnership with China mostly achieved intended targets, reflecting strong ownership from the Government of China. UNDP's rich network of partners from across the Chinese system places high value on its global network by convening power and the ability to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation and thought leadership. Less importance is placed on UNDP as a source of finance, technical assistance and capacity development compared to other UNDP country offices.

UNDP's activities in support of China's development achievements were numerous, diverse and wide in scale, including a focus on community engagement and livelihoods, legal and institutional reform, training and experimentation with new technologies, financing and management methods, development of information systems, spatial planning, knowledge production and dissemination, convening and coordination between different parts of the Chinese system and international actors.

A feature of UNDP's work in China was the extent to which it delivered these activities as part of a dynamic network, including Chinese Government agencies at different levels, government-supported NGOs and social organizations, private companies and foundations, universities and research centres, United Nations agencies[75] and other international actors.

Stakeholders consulted by the Evaluation provided strong positive feedback on UNDP, noting its international experience and expertise, global presence, neutrality and convening ability as particular strengths. Stakeholders emphasized the high value they place on UNDP support in: i) providing increased flexibility to experiment with different systems and approaches and support for system-wide learning; ii) convening and providing a basis for structured cooperation and exchange between stakeholders at different levels, extending to international forums and platforms and South-South cooperation; and iii) framing the task of domestic policy development within global norms and standards informed by international experience. This feedback is closely aligned with previous key studies of UNDP's work in China (including the 2019 ICPE) and with the results of the most recent partner survey conducted in 2020 (Figure 7). These results confirm the high value partners place on UNDP's work in China, with the China Country Office also performing well above the UNDP global average for its perceived value as a partner. Compared to UNDP partners in other countries, UNDP partners in China placed higher value on UNDP's global network, and in particular its ability to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation and thought leadership.

[74] IEO/UNDP, (2019), Independent Country Programme Evaluation, China.

[75] While opportunities for joint programming were limited, UNDP engaged and collaborated constructively with other UN actors in a range of areas, proactively complementing, supporting and reinforcing the influence of the UN system. UNDP engaged in only one joint in the CPD period: the UNOPS/UNDP Interagency Programme on Sustainable Procurement.

Partners with the China Country Office considered UNDP's roles in capacity development, leveraging finance and technical expertise as less important than did partners in other countries. These results square with feedback from stakeholders, who, especially at the national level, suggested greater interest in the exchange of knowledge and experience than in technical support from UNDP.

FIGURE 7. Selected results from the 2020 Partner Survey for the China Country Office

	China	All UNDP partners	Variance from UNDP average	
My perception of UNDP is favourable	97	75	↑	22%
UNDP is a valued partner to my organization	100	80	↑	20%

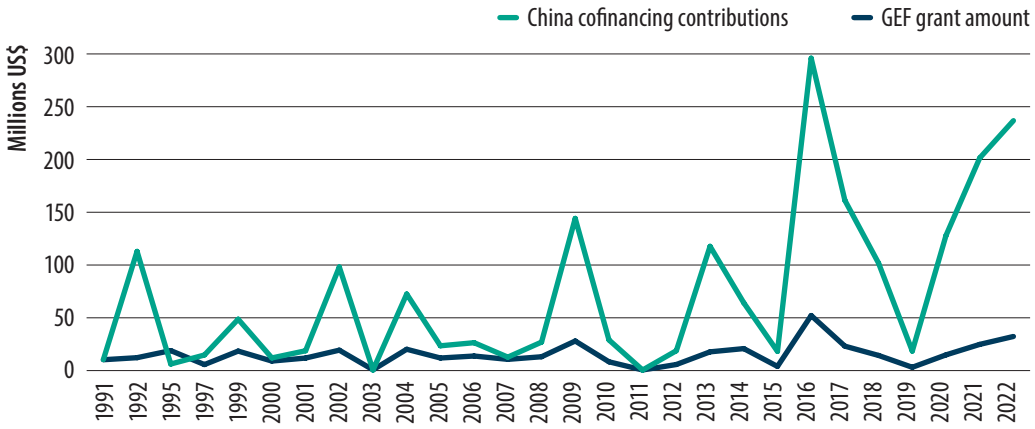
What value does UNDP bring to your organization (% of respondents giving this response)?

Income Group	China	Other country offices	Variance from	
Global Network	69%	20%	↑	49%
South-South and triangular cooperation	40%	6%	↑	34%
Thought leadership on the global development agenda	49%	30%	↑	18%
On-the-ground presence	26%	21%	→	5%
Policy advice	26%	24%	→	2%
Innovative development solutions	20%	19%	→	1%
Operational services	17%	18%	→	-1%
Neutrality and impartiality	11%	12%	→	-1%
Convening power	14%	16%	→	-2%
Integrated solutions to development challenges	14%	21%	→	-7%
Programme and project implementation	57%	66%	→	-9%
Capacity development	34%	47%	↓	-13%
Leveraging financing for development	6%	24%	↓	-18%
Technical expertise	26%	43%	↓	-18%
Number of respondents	35	2,858		

Source: 2020 Partner Survey

The strong performance of the UNDP portfolio in China is reflected in consistently positive project evaluation outcomes, as reflected in ratings for UNDP-GEF project implementation quality (97 percent of which were rated Satisfactory), and outcomes achieved (100 percent of which were rated Satisfactory). UNDP is well-regarded for its professionalism in implementing or (more usually) supporting China's implementation of activities and projects, with only minor operational irritants raised about the partnership. Strong results are reflective of the Chinese government's high implementation capacity, ownership and commitment to using projects as vehicles for policy development and reform and meeting global obligations and targets. This is a consistent theme of interviews, project documentation and data. For example, increasing cofinancing commitments from the Government of China to GEF-financed projects reflects strong ownership, even though this was driven by increasing cofinancing requirements from the GEF (Figure 8). In almost all cases, multilateral grants represent only a minor component of total financing, which originates overwhelmingly from Chinese Government budgets.

FIGURE 8. China's cofinancing of UNDP GEF projects reflects strong ownership and increasingly tougher requirements



Source: GEF Project database

Finding 11. Positioning on Domestic Development Challenges: UNDP's positioning in support of China's domestic development agenda is increasingly fragile given the headwinds facing China's access to traditional sources of development finance and decline in Chinese Government financing.

UNDP's operations in China depend substantially on resourcing from the Montreal Protocol and GEF, which account for 55 percent of UNDP expenditure under the current CPD. China is still the largest recipient of GEF and Montreal Protocol funding due to its importance in the realization of global environmental benefits. However, changes to the GEF resource allocation frameworks substantially reduced China's allocations. GEF allocations to China declined in each new replenishment since the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) was established in GEF-5, and allocations in the most recent replenishment are less than half what they were in GEF4.[76] Similarly, while China remains the largest recipient of Montreal Protocol funding, allocations to China from that mechanism declined modestly and may come under further pressure in the course of the next CPD.[77] Achievement of Net Contributing Status is likely during the next CPD and will require China to fully fund UNDP's office costs.

While the speed of the decline in external funding and the adjustments required are unclear, UNDP's continued presence in China will require ongoing adaptations and will ultimately depend on government financing. The decade-long decline in government financing underlines the challenge UNDP faces in securing agreement over a durable government-financed partnership given the interests, capacities and mandates of both parties. Following its transition to high middle-income status in 2019, China was in arrears in meeting increased obligations to finance local office costs, forcing UNDP to subsidize operations in China from 2020 onwards.

[76] This resulted from an increase in base allocations, which have lifted less developed and small countries' share of available resources and a lowering of ceilings and reduced allocations to high recipient countries. It was also affected by a reduction in the global allocation to climate change from $1,088 million in GEF5 to $524 million in GEF8, which disproportionately affected China given its high share of this component of GEF funding.

[77] For example, in the recent (35th) Conference of the Parties, some parties to the protocol questioned whether China should remain eligible for financial assistance given changes in its economic status since the Protocol was negotiated.

UNDP was successful in mobilizing financing from the private sector, largely from the corporate social responsibility arms of large companies operating in China, which proved a useful vehicle for engaging private sector actors in leveraging private contributions towards the SDGs.[78] However, growth in this revenue stream was not sufficient to offset the decline in other sources, and pursuit of these opportunities incurred high transaction costs given their large number yet small value as well as the short duration of many of these contributions. UNDP's China Country Office was not supported in this task by UNDP policies and instruments, which hampered UNDP's efficient and effective private sector engagement globally.[79]

Finding 12. Research and Communication for Policy Influence: UNDP's capacity as a knowledge producer and broker is key to its influence. UNDP's research and communication capacities at the Country Office level are key assets that deserve to be protected and strengthened given UNDP's high value to China and globally as a thought leader.

Whether as a partner in China's domestic development or global engagements, UNDP's core value and offer is as a knowledge organization, including as a producer, disseminator and convenor of knowledge exchange.

Knowledge production is a key part of downstream project implementation, resulting in myriad knowledge events and products in varying shapes, sizes and topics. However, managing the diversity and number of projects and activities executed by UNDP in different locations across China is resource-intensive and can incentivize siloed thinking and action. Moreover, UNDP's performance frameworks consisting of a plethora of numerical targets can reinforce a narrow focus on measurement and accountability within siloes rather than the iterative and adaptive approaches that will be required to solve the wicked problems facing policymakers.

In this context, the Country Office's research and communication functions are a key asset for their capacity to join the dots between different lines of effort and to complement and amplify the impact of UNDP's work on the ground. Compared to other country offices, resourcing for small in-house policy and research and communications, innovation and partnerships teams (each with three staff) is a strength. The Country Office's policy and research team provide some capacity for UNDP to commission and conduct independent research working with internal experts and credible national and international partners, complementing project-based work. This enabled the production of influential reports on key structural challenges, including the employment impact of the energy transition[80] and the potential application of debt to nature swaps as a solution to unsustainable sovereign debt.[81]

The communications, innovation and partnerships teams provide the ability to communicate and amplify UNDP China's key messages on climate change, biodiversity, poverty reduction, human development and gender equality. This included the creative use of global events and campaigns, interviews, op-eds and social media to build engagement across a broad national audience.

[78] Donors to UNDP have included Coca Cola, the Citi Foundation, the China Petroleum Bio-Energy Company, Dr Plant Biotechnology, Du Xiaoman Technology, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, Syngenta, the Vanke Foundation, the Tanoto Foundation, the Shengzhen Foundation, the China Women's Development Foundation and Baidu.

[79] The IEO's recent evaluation of UNDP's private sector engagement found that "...policies and instruments were insufficient to support private sector engagement, with uncertainties in the application of rules and delays further hampering the organization's capacity to partner with the private sector efficiently and effectively. Areas for improvement were identified in a 2022 review, but for the most part, not yet realized." IEO/UNDP April 2024, Evaluation of the UNDP Support to Private Sector Development and Structural Transformation.

[80] UNDP (2023), Navigating the Path to a Just Transition: Employment Implications of China's Green Transition.

[81] UNDP (2023). (Re)orienting Sovereign Debt to Support Nature and the SDGs: Instruments and their Application in Asia-Pacific Developing Economies. UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub.

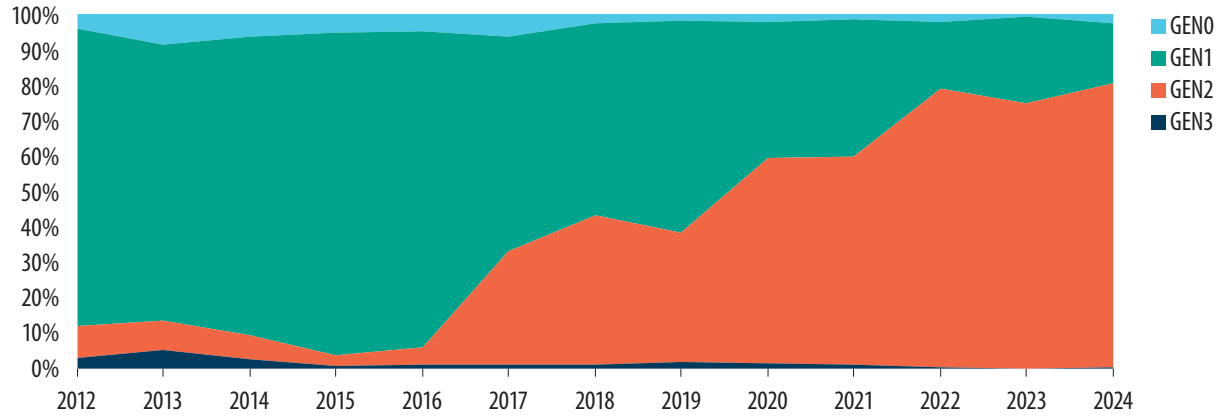
Given the depth of national capacity and international knowledge and interest, there is considerable scope for UNDP to build a stronger identity and influence as a knowledge organization in China by drawing from a reservoir of practical technical engagements and partnerships in a variety of sectors and locations across China. This should include efforts to strengthen collaboration with UNDP's global policy network, with a focus on the development of country and regional knowledge products to address key structural challenges facing China and the region. Support from the UNDP global policy network for UNDP's role as a knowledge leader in China and China's role in global development is currently uneven and could be strengthened.

Finding 13. Gender Equality: UNDP made good progress in gender mainstreaming, lifting the proportion of expenditure on activities where gender equality is a significant objective from less than 10 percent in 2012-2016 to 80 percent in 2024 and obtaining Silver-level certification under UNDP's Gender Seal quality assurance initiative in 2023. Examples of smart advocacy such as UNDP's promotion of women's careers in science and technology are good examples of UNDP's potential to leverage its profile and reputation to positively influence gender norms and values in China.

The last China ICPE in 2019 found that the integration of gender principles in the programme was limited, with more than 95 percent of expenditure expected to contribute to gender equality in a limited way (GEN1) or not expected to contribute to gender equality (GEN0). The Country Office acknowledged the weak focus on gender equality and agreed to the IEO's recommendation to address this deficiency.

In the current cycle, the Country Office significantly increased the allocation of funds to GEN2 projects, reaching 80 percent in 2024, above UNDP's global target of 70 percent. China's strong progress was acknowledged by the Bureau of Programme and Policy Support, which awarded it Silver Gender Equality Seal certification in 2023. The most notable improvements were linked to the Country Office's realignment of its management systems, robust standard operating procedures for mainstreaming gender equality and the ability to demonstrate results (with the Water Governance and Women in STEM initiatives exemplary in this respect). As regards gender in programming, UNDP's support was substantially transformed from what it was in the early 2010s (Figure 9) and is noted by stakeholders in consultations as a valued feature of UNDP's engagement.

FIGURE 9. UNDP China expenditure by gender marker, 2012-2024



Source: UNDP Atlas/Quantum, September 2024

Given implementation contexts, focal areas and objectives, gender results were assessed as largely satisfactory by the more than 20 decentralized project evaluations commissioned by the Country Office since 2021. Results fall largely under the "Gender Targeted" category on the IEO's GRES scale,[82] evidenced by reasonable achievement of equal participation of women and men in project activities and a concerted effort to promote gender equality from design to completion. There are also instances of more gender-responsive programming, particularly within Outcome 1, with its focus on combating inequalities. This included efforts to reduce gender disparities in access to agricultural, digital and financial literacy training. However, we found limited evidence of efforts to improve the status of rural women within their families or to rectify patriarchal social structures and outdated attitudes that prioritize sons over daughters, factors that have the potential to significantly hinder rural women's access to or effective use of resources provided by UNDP or private aid organizations.

Despite Outcome 2 projects being often implemented in traditionally male-dominated fields and activity scopes constrained by donor requirements, UNDP demonstrated strong efforts to maximize opportunities for gender inclusivity. For example, numerous projects included studies of women's participation across various sectors such as copper, lighting and fuel cell vehicles. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives were carried out, promoting more balanced employment opportunities and focusing on women's occupational health.

UNDP China faces a persistent structural challenge is lifting expenditure on projects where gender equality is the main objective (GEN3), which represent 0.5% of expenditure—a decrease from the previous cycle. This reflects limited funding opportunities and internal resourcing, and, related to this, UNDP's ability to carve out a position of influence on key national policy challenges affecting gender equality.

A good example of the discrete low-resource but high-impact advocacy UNDP can deliver is the #HERstory advocacy campaign, in which UNDP in partnership with UN Women shared stories of women working in STEM to inspire women and girls to follow their lead.[83] UNDP should consider replicating this approach by partnering with other UN agencies in advocating for other core socio-economic issues such as an ageing population and policy implications for gender equality by undertaking joint campaigns grounded in substantive research and multi-stakeholder policy dialogues.

Finding 14. Monitoring, Evaluation and Risk Management: A challenge faced across UNDP, the China Country Office's monitoring and evaluation systems are not providing a strong foundation for accountability and learning. Harmonizing external requirements and internal systems with Chinese Government policies and systems on environmental and social safeguards is an area that requires closer attention.

China's vast scale and strong institutional capacity make it intrinsically challenging to provide a compelling explanation of UNDP's role and influence. Compounding this contextual challenge, the China Country Office is not well served by UNDP corporate frameworks, which do not adequately position it to develop compelling evidence-based narratives about its impact.[84] This issue was raised repeatedly by IEO evaluations, which criticized the preponderance of quantitative indicators at programme and project levels that have

[82] The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) framework was developed to provide evaluators with guidance on implementing a gender-responsive analysis of results in evaluations or assessments. It captures variation in the type of gender results with five categories: Gender Negative, Gender Blind, Gender Targeted, Gender Responsive and Gender Transformative. For more information, see: https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES_English.pdf

[83] 30+ videos were collected, receiving a total of 73 million reactions on social media.

[84] This was confirmed again in a recent survey of UNDP leaders, where respondents identified impact measurement as the single weakest aspect of UNDP's service delivery.

little or no value as measures of quality. At the same time, there was insufficient rigorous qualitative analysis or evaluation of UNDP's contributions to development outcomes, especially through difficult-to-measure policy influence and advocacy activities.

This evaluation confirms that the China Country Office is not immune to this greater corporate challenge. Performance narratives show overreliance on often unconvincing estimates of beneficiaries and people reached, pilots and partnerships,[85] with insufficiently rigorous analysis and evidence about the quality of UNDP's activities and the nature of their value and influence. The evaluation has no way of assessing whether this has occurred in China, even though there is a clear risk that such approaches may create perverse or unintended consequences, for example by signalling that the quantity of activity is more important than the quality.[86] Discussion of challenges tends to focus on lower-order operational issues and external factors rather than on higher-order, long-term policy problems that should be guiding UNDP decision-making. Mandatory evaluations are conducted and are of adequate quality but could be better positioned to inform management decision-making, planning and performance reporting.[87]

The Country Office was the subject of a performance audit by the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations in 2024, which issued an audit rating of "Satisfactory/Some improvement." This less than fully satisfactory outcome is related mainly to the challenges the Country Office faced in terms of financial sustainability. The audit also highlighted challenges in complying with Social and Environmental Screening Procedure policy requirements, including for several substantial projects rated "high-risk." The audit attributed the challenges to delays in government approval for project implementation and ongoing stakeholder consultations in determining project sites. Given the complexity of the GEF and Chinese Government policy requirements and the number of high-risk projects in China, this will require broader corporate support to strengthen UNDP-wide institutional capacities for assessing and mitigating social and environmental risk.[88]

[85] For example, UNDP reporting captures 16 million beneficiaries of SSC and SSTC financing facilitated by UNDP. UNDP reported 12 against a target of five for number of pilots with adopted sustainable and gender-sensitive biodiversity-friendly approaches and practices. UNDP has reported eight against a target of one public-private partnership in targeted areas to advance sustainable low-carbon practices.

[86] See, for example, Perrin, B. (2015), Bringing accountability up to date with the realities of public sector management in the 21st century: New view of accountability, *Canadian Public Administration*, Volume 58, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/capa.12107

[87] During this programme cycle, the China CO commissioned 21 evaluations covering 20 projects, all of which were assessed as satisfactory by the IEO in its quality assurance role. However, lessons from evaluations are not apparent in annual business unit planning or results oriented annual reports. This suggests that evaluation could be more strategically positioned to support portfolio planning and management rather than limited to project management and accountability.

[88] As discussed in the IEO's 2021 Evaluation of UNDP Support to Climate Change Adaptation, UNDP has been slow to rectify documented weaknesses in the screening procedures and standards, including by building a cadre of experts in the regional hubs to advise on SES Standard 3 and on providing training and capacity building on climate-related topics to UNDP staff and implementing partners.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

3.1 Conclusions

China's traditional growth model is ending, necessitating reforms with global implications, especially given China's influence in the world.

China's development trajectory will be shaped by its capacity to navigate domestic and global challenges. Globally, anaemic growth due to the lingering effects of the pandemic, high inflation and debt is feeding into competition for resources, anti-globalization sentiments, systemic instabilities and geopolitical tensions. In this context, China's integration into global value chains and international institutions is a source of both strength and vulnerability. Domestically, structural shifts in major sectors (e.g., coal, heavy industry) will require intensive people-centred reform and investment.

Much will depend on how quickly China can transform into an innovation-driven economy for high-quality green development, cultivating new engines for growth that can sustain both people and the planet and strengthen China's place in the world and its contributions to it. Countries in the Global South that are now where China was two decades ago cannot follow the same growth path given planetary boundaries. China's lessons will be key to their ability to adopt more sustainable, efficient and greener development pathways. China is eminently positioned to finance and promote new models of growth and development.

Conclusion 1. UNDP continues to play a valued role in China by leveraging its mandate, comparative advantage and limited resources. This evaluation assesses the value of UNDP's contributions as most tangible in areas where it has a unique offer: creating a bridge between China and the world while advocating on issues where there are few diverse voices. Given China's vast scale, strong institutions, rapid development progress and ownership over external assistance, it is difficult to attribute specific outcomes or impacts to UNDP or to quantify the value of UNDP's influence.

Under the current CPD, UNDP maintained its valuable role in support of China's strong progress and record of achievement under international environmental agreements, including the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Montreal Protocol and the Convention on Biodiversity.

With limited financing opportunities, UNDP kept poverty and inequality on the agenda through diverse interventions increasingly framed around supporting China in reaping the benefits and mitigate the human cost of the clean energy transition. UNDP continued to serve as an important international platform for information dissemination and advocacy for people living with HIV and sexual minorities. In the recent past, UNDP paid strong consistent attention to gender equality, a major improvement on the emphasis previously given to gender equality. UNDP leveraged its profile and position in China to deliver smart advocacy linked to global and national policies and events on issues such as climate change, youth and careers for girls in STEM.

By backing global commitments to reinvigorate the United Nations development system's South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation mandate,[89] UNDP supported the evolution of China's global development policies and systems, a role valued by stakeholders in China and the Global North. Reflecting China's importance as a source of learning, technology transfer and investment in the Global South, projects increasingly included explicit commitments to this goal alongside domestically focused objectives.

UNDP worked effectively with diverse stakeholders, who were universally positive about the value, quality and relevance of UNDP's support.

[89] For example, General Assembly Resolution A/RES/73/291 on the outcome document from the Second UN High-Level Conference on SSC in 2019.

Conclusion 2. Given China's emergence as a major economic and technological power, UNDP's role in China moved away from traditional notions of the UN development pillar as an approach to development cooperation that centres on two groups of states and a one-way relationship between them whereby rich countries provide support to poor countries. By breaking the traditional logic of development assistance as a process of North-South transfer, UNDP is helping to facilitate relationships and learning in multiple directions, with potential to do more in this area.

Given its vast resources, China has little need for external finance, and strong institutions reduce the value of external technical assistance and capacity development even if there may still be value in such assistance at the local level. UNDP's operational role has some continuing value, but largely as a vehicle for providing exposure to international perspectives and experiences and increasingly as a basis for two-way knowledge transfer and exchange. China's model of transformative development out of poverty traps is a key source of lessons for countries in the Global South. China is a key platform for lessons and technological transfer on low-carbon development.

Though China is still classified as a developing country under prevailing definitions, given its growth trajectory, this is unlikely to last much longer. Proliferating global challenges and increasing transnational interdependence provide a compelling justification for UNDP's continued presence in China irrespective of country typology because China is pivotal to the success of global agreements and Chinese support and finance will be critical to the evolution of the multilateral system and in supporting development in the Global South. UNDP's presence is underpinned by decisions of UNDP's Executive Board and in successive Strategic Plans as well as in and through UNDP's country-level agreements, with no requirement for countries to graduate once they reach certain income thresholds. However, maintaining a meaningful presence requires a clarity of vision aligned with a mandate and resources and support from the Chinese Government.

Conclusion 3. Sustainability of UNDP operations in China is the core issue facing the Country Office. With the likely continuing decline in external development financing for China and absent changes in the UNDP business model, UNDP's future presence will depend on China's willingness to finance it. This will require UNDP to be clear about its capabilities and offer in the context of a Country Office that is almost fully financed by China as well as the implications of this development. UNDP must continue to sharpen its offer to adapt to changes in China and in the global environment.

While there continues to be scope for UNDP to play an influential role in supporting China's domestic development as well as global development cooperation, UNDP's position in China is increasingly fragile. UNDP is heavily dependent on financing from vertical funds, which will likely become harder to access in the future depending on the outcomes of board deliberations and future replenishments. Government financing targets under the current CPD will likely be exceeded. However, government financing has declined from above $10 million in the early 2010s to around $5 million in recent years, a trend that will need to be reversed for UNDP to maintain a substantive role in the areas where it is currently operating.

Given limited resourcing, it is a huge challenge for UNDP to engage substantively on key policy issues and goals, which relate to both China's domestic development needs and its global engagements on development issues. Continued decline in external financing will make this more challenging.

As China approaches high-income status, sustaining UNDP's presence in China will require at least one of two things to occur. First, it will require a reversal of the increasing prioritization of key governing boards of low- and middle-income countries in financial allocations. Given that some key financing instruments such as the GEF and the Montreal Protocol have allocation criteria whereby income status is not a

critical determinant of outcomes, this is not out of the question but is less likely given prevailing trends. Alternatively, it will require an increase in government financing from China along the lines of what has been achieved in other high-income country contexts, especially in Latin America.

This makes it particularly important for UNDP to be clear-eyed both internally and externally about its core value given China's stage of development and role in the world and to use this as an organizing framework for the partnership. While UNDP is providing value in other areas, the evaluation assesses the value of UNDP's contributions as most compelling where it advocates, convenes and provides thought leadership in two areas: a) global partnerships, facilitating China's emergence as a major development actor and effective delivery of Chinese finance and know-how to other countries in the Global South; and b) supporting domestic policy development to meet global targets and agreements informed by international experience. China's status as the world's second largest CO2 emitter and second most populous country makes it a vital testing ground for green development, underlining the value of continued investment and engagement from the global development community.

Private financing may provide one part of the solution for maintaining a UNDP presence, even if UNDP will need to establish longer term more resilient partnerships with private actors, which will also require strong corporate support.

Conclusion 4. UNDP did not meet its potential as a partner in the delivery of China's development assistance given its mandate and advantages in the UN system as a conduit for South-South cooperation.

Given China's emergence as a leader and major provider of finance for global development, the high value Chinese stakeholders place on UNDP's global network and ability to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation, UNDP's positioning as a partner in global development with China is not as strong as it should be. UNDP was one of the few UN agencies that failed to secure increased support from China in the form of core or earmarked funding. This is a significant corporate concern given UNDP's continued reliance on a small group of traditional donors for funding as well as slow progress in diversifying funding sources.

Regardless of the level of Chinese support, there is clear value in UNDP maintaining a presence in China given the potential to leverage this presence to raise funding in support of the UNDP's work in low-income economies and to facilitate triangular, South-South, North-South and South-North cooperation and dialogue. Establishing this service as a clearer offer to other country offices could provide a small part of the solution to the Country Office financing equation.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. UNDP should sharpen its focus on where it can offer the most value for China and global development, considering China's stage of development, institutional capacity and vast resources. UNDP should maintain and strengthen its support for South-South cooperation and South-North exchanges as a key cross-cutting consideration in its partnership with China. UNDP should maintain its support for domestic policy development and debate framed within the context of China's commitments to meeting global norms and standards and use its global network and knowledge to enrich China's debate with evidence about international experience.

Consistent with the encouragement of the General Assembly and successive UNDP strategic plans, facilitating South-South cooperation should be maintained as a key cross-cutting objective for UNDP's partnership with China and the work of the Country Office. Noting China's importance as a source of global development finance and development lessons, this element of UNDP's mandate is particularly relevant

to its work in and with China. UNDP should continue to provide constructive technical input in supporting the evolution of China's global development policy and practice working with MOFCOM, CIDCA, the China Development Bank, China Exim Bank, civil society and private sector actors. In line with the UN's SSC Strategy expectations and UNDP's South-South Cooperation Strategy, care is needed to ensure that such interactions provide enough space for southern perspectives and needs to influence global and regional policies and international development cooperation.

UNDP should maintain and develop its role as a facilitator of South-North cooperation and dialogue, including in the context of norms and standards related to development cooperation and collective action to achieve global public goods, especially climate change mitigation and adaptation. With its broad development mandate and neutrality, UNDP is uniquely placed in the international system to facilitate and support effective engagement between China and the Global South and North. Reflecting this positioning, UNDP is highly valued for its convening capacity and should continue to look for strategic opportunities to play this role, supporting constructive debate and building consensus.

As regards development work within China, UNDP should maintain its support for China's transition to a green, low-carbon economy, promotion of the SDGs and advocacy for the needs of poor and vulnerable groups of society. SDG localization could serve as an entry point for expansion of government-financed UNDP programmes in China, aligned with China's commitment to establish around 10 Innovation Demonstration Zones for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and building on work undertaken with government actors in Yangzhou, Suzhou, Chenzhou and Shanghai, among others. Local government financing should be focused on supporting China's coal-dependent regions to shift to renewable energy, ensuring that no one is left behind from this transition, supporting governments to benchmark themselves against global and national standards and experimenting with and sharing lessons on the carbon transition. Provincial and local-level interventions should be framed with a strong learning objective and an explicit commitment to influence national policies and approaches to meeting global commitments.

UNDP should pursue opportunities to maintain or increase financial support for its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion agenda. Although challenging at the stage of designing the next CPD, UNDP should endeavour to discuss possible avenues for cooperation with Chinese authorities. While cooperation on HIV alone is relatively less challenging because it was seen as a public health issue, cooperating with sexual minority groups directly can be more difficult if not impossible. As an alternative, the focus could be on providing technical support for addressing issues faced by these groups and facilitating private funding for public awareness-raising and capacity building of civil society organizations.

Recommendation 2. To prepare for the next CPD, UNDP should work with China to agree to a government financing model that will offset declining external financing opportunities and enable a more strategic partnership underpinned by flexible and predictable programmatic financing. In parallel, UNDP should accelerate discussions with China about its value as a conduit for Chinese development finance, its key role as a component of effective South-South support and the importance of core financing to sustaining its global operations.

The next five years will be critical to determining the future of UNDP's Country Office in China given its likely graduation to Net Contributing Country status and continued tightening of opportunities for external financing that are sustaining UNDP operations in China.

Securing UNDP's will require a strong mutual understanding of the expected role and focus of the Country Office and its resourcing requirements beyond the critical, cross-cutting local office capacities (with seven posts) covered directly by China to secure UNDP's physical presence. Following Recommendation 1, this

should reflect UNDP's strengths and value-adding given China's stage of development. Though UNDP's mandate and national priorities are largely congruent, demands from the national side need to be moderated and discussed openly to strive towards optimal alignment. Implementation modalities and approaches will need to change as UNDP operations transition from vertical financing to government and to a much lesser extent private sector actors. There is an opportunity for negotiating the next stage of the partnership, moving away from project-based funding to more flexible and predictable programmatic financing.

Government financing can be supplemented by working with and leveraging partnerships with other actors, in particular civil society, the private sector and international stakeholders. Private financing may be part of the funding mix, but to maximize the benefit from private contributions, UNDP will need to develop more durable, flexible, long-term models for leveraging private contributions. This is not a task China can carry out alone. It will require stronger corporate leadership as well as reform to UNDP policies and instruments, which hampered efficient and effective private sector engagement.

UNDP should actively draw on complementary inputs from its regional and global programmes and connections to the United Nations system, which will be critical for UNDP to maintain its unique identity and effectiveness. UNDP China should explore opportunities for cost recovery from UNDP's global network, focusing on its capacity to facilitate access to new partnerships and finance and expanding the support it is already providing to that network.

As one of only a few major UN agencies that did not capitalize on China's emergence as a globally significant source of official development assistance and other development finance, UNDP should intensify discussion with China about its value proposition. Establishing stronger core and non-core financing agreements with China will be an important part of UNDP's ability to diversify its funding sources and maintain its global network and operations.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should strengthen its role in China by prioritizing applied policy research and smart, understated policy advice and advocacy tied to China's commitments to global objectives. Given the depth of scholarship and capability that exists regarding China as well as globally, there is potential for UNDP to increase its output in this space in collaboration with other UN agencies and its internal network. Where relevant and useful, the Country Office should develop substantive collaborations with UNDP's global policy network and links with global and regional programmes around key knowledge products and advocacy efforts.

UNDP should leverage its continuing engagements in China's climate and greening agenda, identifying and encouraging the structural reforms that will be required to accelerate China's ambition and contribution to global targets. UNDP should continue to focus on the implications of structural reform and on responses required to ensure that no one is left behind. Vulnerable groups and the implications of uneven development should remain in focus.

UNDP should continue to strengthen its policy research and advocacy on gender equality, with a focus on structural constraints and risks to gender equality and on promoting changes in norms and cultural values that will enable China to maintain and build on hard-won gains. This should include work that addresses the implications of climate change and the ageing population for women's roles and economic participation. UNDP can work more closely with UN Women in areas such as MSME women entrepreneur training programmes and supporting women and girls in taking up careers in STEM.

UNDP should be more systematic in leveraging downstream work to surface lessons and inform advocacy at higher levels. Given China's huge scale and UNDP's constrained financing, UNDP's influence is likely to be greater through smart policy and advisory work rather than through small downstream investments with weak links to any policy or advocacy agenda.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should reorient monitoring and evaluation to better explain UNDP's mandate and value in China, the problems it is working with China to solve, the quality of the contributions it is making and what it is learning. Given China's vast scale, high institutional capacity and ownership over external support, UNDP's value lies in its ability to contribute to and influence policy discussion and debate rather than in impacts that can be directly attributed to UNDP. Facilitating exchange of lessons from China's development should also be a key emphasis for monitoring and evaluation systems and external communications.

UNDP China should minimize adoption and reporting on performance indicators that do not adequately reflect UNDP's core value and offer for China. UNDP should increase the use of qualitative indicators and strengthen reporting to enable it to synthesize a range of sources of information, reflect on the direction of travel and learning and articulate the over-the-horizon problems it is working to solve with China. To discipline and create a common frame for discussion, reporting and internal collaboration, UNDP should structure its reporting on the core elements of UNDP's mandate and value proposition for China at this stage of its development, namely thought leadership, global network and the ability to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation. Given China's vast size, institutional capacity and imminent transition to high-income status, UNDP's positioning and value proposition need to be clearly reflected in what it frames as success, which is more plausibly connected to the influence of its contributions to debate and decision-making than to outcomes or impacts at scale that can be directly attributed to UNDP. Evaluation could be positioned more strategically to capture the conditions for policy and advocacy work and their outcomes and to inform decision-making and accountability at the portfolio level.

3.3 Key recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1:

UNDP should sharpen its focus on where it can offer most value for China and global development considering China's stage of development, institutional capacity and vast resources. UNDP should maintain and strengthen its support for south-south cooperation and south-north exchanges as a key cross-cutting consideration in its partnership with China. UNDP should maintain its support for domestic policy development and debate framed in the context of China's commitments to meeting global norms and standards and use its global network and knowledge to enrich China's debate with evidence of international experience.

Management response: Agreed

UNDP China, as part of the development of the UNSDCF (2026-2030), will undertake consultations with the Government of China and key stakeholders to frame the focus of UNDP's CPD (2026-2030) to address the development challenges and priorities outlined in the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) and accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), global climate agendas and the Pact for the Future adopted at the Summit of the Future in 2024. UNDP will continue to leverage its global network and South-South and Trilateral Cooperation platforms and initiatives to facilitate mutual knowledge and experience sharing between China and partner countries on best practices and lessons learned to accelerate sustainable development in alignment with the development priorities outlined in the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029 and the CPD 2026-2030.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	*Tracking	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Finalize the focus of the draft CPD 2026-2030, identifying UNDP's specific value proposition and contributions to help achieve the UNSDCF outcomes and outputs and support the realization of development priorities put forward in the 15th Five-Year Plan.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		
1.2 Finalize the implementation approaches and strategic partnerships in the draft CPD 2026-2030, including by leveraging technical expertise derived from the UNDP Global Policy Network and UN System to achieve the above objectives.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		

RECOMMENDATION 2:

To prepare for the next CPD, UNDP should work with China to agree to a Government financing model that will offset declining external financing opportunities and enable a more strategic partnership underpinned by flexible and predictable programmatic financing.

In parallel, UNDP should accelerate discussions with China about its value as a conduit for Chinese development finance, the importance of this conduit as a component of effective South-South support and the importance of core financing for sustaining its global operations.

Management response: Agreed

In tandem with its Upper Middle Income (UMIC) status and corresponding availability (or decline) in external funding for programming interventions in China, the Country Office agrees on the recommendation to engage with the Government to identify opportunities to further scale-up the financial envelope through government co-financing in addressing the development priorities outlined in the 15th Five-Year Plan and with a focus on accelerating SDG progress at the sub-national level.

While recognizing the important role that China could play by financially contributing to the acceleration of the SDGs globally by supporting UNDP's global programmatic interventions, this is operationally outside of the mandate of the approved CPD. UNDP China, with the support of the Regional Bureau, will continue to advocate with the Government for its positive consideration of supporting and increasing core contribution to UNDP to fund its global operations. Leveraging its presence in China, UNDP will also continue to provide facilitation services for UNDP Country Offices globally to access south-south cooperation and technical assistance from China to meet the development needs of developing countries to accelerate SDG progress and global climate commitments.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 CO will ensure that the Resource Mobilization Target for the draft CPD 2026-2030 reflects a significant increase of up to 100% in government co-financing from the current CPD cycle.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		
2.2 CO will finalize a Development Solutions Toolkit outlining UNDP's programmatic support to accelerate the SDGs at sub-national level and to be utilized for identification of pipeline projects to be funded by government co-financing for the CPD 2026-2030.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		

Recommendation 2 (cont'd)

2.3 CO will coordinate with the Regional Bureau and relevant HQ Bureaus on advocating an increase in funding from China to UNDP's global programme and operations to accelerate SDG progress in developing countries.	December 2025	CO Senior Management and Regional Bureau		

RECOMMENDATION 3:

UNDP should continue to strengthen its role as a thought leader in China by increasing its investment in applied policy research, smart, understated policy advice and advocacy tied to China's commitments to global objectives. Given the depth of scholarship and capability that exists regarding China itself in China and globally, there is potential for UNDP to increase its output in this space in collaboration with other UN agencies and its internal network.

Where relevant and useful, the Country Office should develop substantive collaborations with UNDP's global policy network as well as links with global and regional programmes around key knowledge products and advocacy efforts.

Management response: Agreed

UNDP China will continue to build on the significant thought leadership generated through the policy research initiatives undertaken in the current cycle and continue building external and internal funding partnerships to strengthen in-house capabilities while expanding its network of research partners. This will ensure that UNDP can further deepen its contribution to advancing evidence-based development assessments and solutions to address frontier challenges as a signature service offer in China's UMIC context. Codification of lessons learned and best practices will be disseminated for mutual global learning and exchange.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Finalize the identification of key policy research programmes and outputs in the draft CPD 2026-2030 by leveraging UNDP's technical expertise derived from the UNDP Global Policy Network, UN System and global and domestic think-tanks and academia to support achievement of the SDGs by 2030 and supporting the implementation of development priorities outlined in the 15th Five-Year Plan in China.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		

RECOMMENDATION 4:

UNDP should strengthen and reorient monitoring and evaluation systems to better explain UNDP's mandate and value in China, the problems it is working with China to solve, the quality of the contributions it is making and what it is learning. Given China's vast scale and high institutional capacity and ownership over external support, UNDP's impact lies in its ability to contribute effectively and influence policy discussion and debate rather than outcomes or impacts that can be directly attributed to UNDP.

Facilitating exchange of lessons from China's development should also be a key emphasis for monitoring and evaluation systems and external communications.

Management response: Agreed

UNDP will develop a methodology and framework to systematically communicate development impact and ensure that results achieved inform future policy programming.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Develop a methodology and framework suitable for UNDP programming in a UMIC context to monitor and assess the development impact and results of the CO's upstream policy engagement to inform future policy programming and pipeline development priorities.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		
4.2 Systematic codification and knowledge management of lessons learned from project interventions and research products will be further strengthened to communicate development impact and influence. With this end in mind, the CO will develop a new checklist of Programme Documents to ensure that knowledge products and advocacy is a standard deliverable of project outputs. The CO will also develop a Partnerships and Communications Action Plan 2026-2030 to further systematically showcase development results achieved in a UMIC context and articulate advocacy objectives.	December 2025	CO Senior Management		

*Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/24536

Annex 1. Evaluation Terms of Reference

Annex 2. Country at a Glance

Annex 3. Country Office at a Glance

Annex 4. Projects under Review

Annex 5. Evolution of the UNDP–China Partnership, 1980 to Today

Annex 6. Documents consulted

Annex 7. Status of Country Programme Document (CPD) Outcome and Output Indicators Matrix

Annex 8. Performance Rating Matrix

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, DC1-20th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. +1 (646) 781 4200

/www.undp.org/evaluation
/UNDP_Evaluation
/evaluationoffice
/company/undp-ieo

Evaluations for a #strongerUNDP