



# Government of Mongolia and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2017-2022)

## Evaluation Report

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Commissioned by the UNDAF Steering Committee in Mongolia

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## Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
I. Introduction.....	9
II. Country Context and the UNDAF .....	11
III. Evaluation Approach and Methodology.....	16
IV. Evaluation Findings.....	18
<b>A. Relevance and adaptability: Is the UNDAF doing the right things? .....</b>	<b>18</b>
1. National development priorities and alignment to the SDGs.....	18
2. Response to emerging and unforeseen needs, and adaptability of the UNDAF .....	19
3. Key issues and development challenges and relevance to international commitments.....	21
<b>B. Effectiveness: Is the UNDAF achieving its objectives? .....</b>	<b>22</b>
1. Suitability of the indicators to measure progress .....	22
2. Achievement of the UNDAF outputs, including gaps .....	23
3. UN’s plausible contribution to UNDAF outcomes .....	24
4. Factors affecting implementation .....	25
5. Geographical spread, integrated programming and geographical targeting.....	26
6. Role of communication .....	27
<b>C. Sustainability and orientation towards impact: Will the benefits last? What difference does the UNDAF make? .....</b>	<b>28</b>
1. Capacity development at national and local levels .....	28
2. Sustainable changes that will last beyond UNCT’s intervention -- scaling up and replication .....	28
3. Orientation towards real impact on people.....	30
<b>D. Coherence and coordination: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?.....</b>	<b>32</b>
1. The UNDAF as an effective and strategic tool for the UN system in Mongolia .....	32
2. Management structure and decision-making processes (Steering Committee, Outcome Groups, other groups) .....	33
3. Joint Work Plans, monitoring and reporting.....	35
4. Coordination of UN’s intervention with its partners.....	37
5. Comparative advantages of the UN .....	38
<b>E. Efficiency: How well are resources being used? .....</b>	<b>40</b>
1. Role of operations and transaction costs.....	40
2. Integrated funding framework and resource mobilization .....	41
<b>F. Crosscutting principles: Have the UNDAF left no one behind?.....</b>	<b>42</b>
1. Mainstreaming of gender equality and women’s empowerment .....	42
2. Human Rights-Based Approach.....	45

3.	Leaving No One Behind .....	47
4.	Consideration of environmental implications .....	49
5.	Disability inclusion .....	49
V.	Limitations and Lessons Learned .....	50
VI.	Summary Performance Rating .....	52
VII.	Conclusions.....	52
VIII.	Recommendations.....	1

## Annexes

Provided separately

Annex 1: Evaluation Approach and Methodology, updated from the Inception Report	
Annex 2: Evaluation criteria and key questions	
Annex 3: List of references and background documents	
Annex 4: Evaluability checklist for UNDAF 2017-2022 Mongolia	
Annex 5: List of Questions for Outcome Groups	
Annex 6: List of questions for Thematic and Working Groups	
Annex 7: Interview Guides for key informants	
Annex 8: Achievement of the UNDAF outputs	
Annex 9: List of joint UN programmes and projects	
Annex 10: UNDAF M&E Framework -- Current Progress of the Indicators	
Annex 11: Evaluation design matrix	
Annex 12: Evaluation and Theory of Change	
Annex 13: List of interviewees and questionnaires respondents, and Stakeholder mapping and analysis	
Annex 14: Summary Performance Rating	
Annex 15: Terms of Reference for the UNDAF evaluation	
Annex 16: Biography of consultants	
Table 1. UNDAF M&E Framework - Current Progress of the Indicators as the end of 2020 .....	24
Box 1. Some observations on impact in UN agencies' evaluations.....	31
Box 2. UNCT working arrangements according to the Management and Accountability Framework....	35

## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFCYD	Authority for Family, Child and Youth Development
BIOFIN	Biodiversity Finance Initiative
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CHIPS	Cooking, Heating, Insulation, Products and Services
CG	Communication Group
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GBV/DV	Gender-Based Violence / Domestic Violence
GBV/CP	Gender-Based Violence / Child Protection
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GoM	Government of Mongolia
GTG	Gender Thematic Group
HAST	Harmonized Cash Transfers
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
JWP	Joint Work Plan
LCDV	Law to Combat Domestic Violence
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MDT	Multi-disciplinary team
OSSC	One Stop Service Centre
RBM	Results-Based Management
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDCO	United Nations Development Cooperation Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEDAP	Evaluation Advisors' Group in Asia Pacific Region
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

# Executive Summary

This report presents the results of the independent evaluation of the Government of Mongolia (GoM) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (2017-2022).

## Evaluation scope and main areas of enquiry

The objectives of the evaluation are (i) Support greater accountability of the UN system for working effectively and in alignment with UN programming principles to contribute to agreed results in the UNDAF 2017-2022; (ii) Promote learning from the experience of implementing the current UNDAF 2017-2022 about what works, what doesn't and why; (iii) Provide clear, actionable, strategic and programmatic recommendations, in priority order, that will inform the next UNSDCF cycle.

In terms of scope, this was the final evaluation of the current cycle of the UNDAF (2017-2022), and it covered the implementation period from 2017 up to September 2021, and all programmes and projects implemented by UN resident and non-resident agencies under the UNDAF outcomes, at both national and sub-national levels. The evaluation was guided by the criteria of relevance and adaptability, effectiveness, sustainability and orientation towards impact, coherence and coordination, and efficiency. It also analyzed the conformity to crosscutting programming principles.

## Methodology

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was conducted remotely, and the data collection plan was adjusted accordingly. Information from the different lines of inquiry was triangulated to improve the reliability of the findings, and to ensure that the recommendations are well grounded and implementable. The methodology was the following:

- Preparation meetings and inception report
- Desk review of written sources
- Stakeholder's mapping, analysis and sampling
- Analysis of the Theory of Change
- Exploratory meeting with the UN Chairs of the Outcome Groups
- List of Questions for, and meetings with Outcome Groups
- List of Questions for, and meetings with Thematic and Working Groups
- Virtual meetings or interviews with key informants
- Analysis of the programming principles
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations at Stakeholder and Prioritization Workshop
- Report drafting

## Summary of evaluation findings

1. Evidence shows that the UNDAF was aligned with the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030, which very well reflected the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN has adapted its work and responded to the emerging and unforeseen needs of the country. The most prominent example is undoubtedly the UN collective response to COVID-19. However, there are frequent changes of Government in Mongolia, and the context evolves rapidly, presenting challenges for retention of institutional knowledge and continuity of UNDAF implementation.

2. Some UNDAF indicators are formulated in a way that does not allow for the effective monitoring & evaluation (M&E) of results. Several indicators are high and too ambitious for the UN to make significant contributions. An indicator validation exercise / evaluability exercise could have been useful to ensure the suitability of the results matrix to better measure results. A Theory of Change (ToC) would have been useful to ensure that the outputs were sufficient for the achievement of the outcomes, with suitable indicators that can capture all the UN contributions. For the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the UN will need to be realistic in terms of outputs, outcomes, indicators and targets formulation, to ensure that the results can be measured, and the contribution of the UN determined.
3. The evaluation report describes the outputs that have been achieved for each of the three UNDAF outcomes. This is not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative. In particular, the evaluation looked at the UN's plausible contribution to UNDAF outcomes (changes observed at national level, including changes in relevant statistical indicators). In Outcome 1, the UN plausibly contributed to the legal environment for national development policy planning and budgeting and expansion of the protected area network in Mongolia. For Outcome 2, the UN credibly contributed to the achievement of national targets on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), COVID-19 response in the health sector including vaccine and sustaining the continuation of learning during the COVID-19, through an integrated approach to support tele- and e-learning along with child protection (CP) services for children and families. In Outcome 3, improving the legal framework to protect and uphold human rights, including the right to freedom from violence (Gender-Based Violence / Domestic Violence (GBV/DV) and Violence Against Children, as well as in implementing and monitoring these laws, can be regarded as a key plausible contribution to the UNDAF outcome.
4. There are many concrete examples of collaborative projects launched under the UNDAF that have been maintained by national partners and counterparts or replicated and scaled up by the government. However, a lack of resources and of a scale-up or replication strategy hinder the potential to maintain some UNDAF benefits over time. Some successful UN interventions related to the delivery of social services to children ended due to the lack of budget for scale-up and replication. The government engagement is crucial for the sustainability and alignment of the UNDAF with government priorities, from the onset of the development of the UNDAF.
5. The UNDAF was oriented towards having a real impact on people and made a difference towards protecting the rights of people and their living environment. Many public health measures supported by the UN have reached people on the ground. Interesting observations on impact were also made in some UN agencies' evaluations, which attest that the UNDAF had an impact in many ways and in numerous programmes of UN agencies. In some cases, however, it is too premature to evaluate the impact of its results.
6. Internally within the UN, the UNDAF has not fully served as an effective and strategic tool for the collective interventions of the UN system. Internal synergies are missing, except in a few joint programmes, however, these are generally not derived from the UNDAF, and are rather resource driven, taking advantage of funding opportunities. While the UNDAF has not been very useful, for programming, at least it gave the broad directions for all UN agencies, and provided the big picture on which agencies tried to align, and a rationale for joint interventions and programming.
7. Externally, the UN has contributed to the coordination and coherence among the Government organizations, by promoting the SDGs as the heart of long-term development policy of Mongolia. However, an enhanced cooperation would be needed with the Government, which should have a stronger ownership of the UNDAF implementation. The Resident Coordinator

(RC) and UNCT have a close relationship with development partners. There are efforts to improve the coordination and cooperation between the UN and development partners, through the establishment of Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Development Partners Group (DPG). In addition, under the leadership of the RC, the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) is coordinating and helping to establish sub/thematic groups for the DPG to enhance coordination and effectiveness of specific thematic areas. This should help to better address sensitive issues, through structured discussions with the Government. CSOs can complement well both the UN and development partners, and there are opportunities of collaboration with the Academia and the private sector in the implementation of the UNDAF.

## Summary of conclusions

At the design stage, the UNDAF was aligned with the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030, which very well reflected the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During implementation, the UN has adapted its work and responded to the emerging and unforeseen needs of the country. The most prominent adaptability is undoubtedly the UN collective response to COVID-19.

Some of the main factors that contributed to progress towards UNDAF outcomes has been a clear long term development policy, and the legal environment. In terms of challenges, COVID-19, high turnover of government staff following the elections and associated loss of institutional memory has been a constraint in UNDAF implementation.

There is an interesting experience of integrated programming through a joint programme, implemented by WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF in the Umnogobi province, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations. The evaluation team suggests that this could be a possible model to address the geographic spread of UN interventions through a more integrated approach aiming at creating models of interventions that can then be replicated and scaled up.

There are many concrete examples of collaborative projects launched under the UNDAF that have been sustained by national partners and counterparts, or replicated and scaled up by the government. However, a lack of resources and scale-up or replication strategy hinder the potential to maintain UNDAF benefits over time. The government engagement is crucial for sustainability, and a financing mechanism could help to sustain UN interventions.

The UNDAF National Steering Committee, which met once a year, has not been involved in many substantive discussions, and there are opportunities in this direction. Organizing more regular meetings of the Steering Committee (twice or thrice a year), and dealing with more substantive issues, could ensure a more meaningful participation and increased ownership of high-level Government officials in the future Cooperation Framework implementation. The Outcome Groups and the Thematic Groups met infrequently in this UNDAF cycle. There has been a limited role and involvement of both RC and of the UNCT in the coordination of Outcome Groups. The evaluation team considers that Outcome Groups could be co-chaired by UN agencies and the Government.

The Outcome Groups did not have substantive discussions involving government counterparts to review the results. The role of the OG Chairs is quite crucial in this sense. The rotation in the agencies chairing the OGs could help to make them more dynamic and offer the agencies a sense of a mission and of achievements after a period of two years for instance. Co-chairing an OG can most likely be done only by agencies on the ground with enough staff and capacity.

While the UNDAF document had foreseen to be made operational through the development of Joint Work Plans (JWPs) and/or agency-specific work plans and project documents, the Outcome Groups, the

UNCT did not develop JWPs in the format recommended by DCO in the UNDAF Guidelines, that they would have used to monitor the UNDAF implementation. JWPs have not been considered indispensable to implement the UNDAF. Instead, all projects implemented by UN agencies have been listed in the UN-INFO platform. As a result, it has been difficult to show common results. However, the UNCT, with the support of the Outcome Groups and RCO, analyzed and monitored all the UN interventions in Mongolia using the UN-INFO since the UNDAF start which contributed to very well-documented UNDAF annual cumulative progress reports.

The UN is one of the more consistent voices on human rights, and encourages Mongolia to implement human rights conventions, and the UNDAF has focused on human rights and contributed to the fulfilment of Mongolia's international and regional commitments and obligations. Nonetheless, the UNDAF document did not pay a significant attention to Human Rights Based Approach and the observations and recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and other HR mechanisms. There are also certain observations and recommendations repeatedly provided by the mechanisms, which were not addressed by the government. The Human Rights Team Group was created at the end of 2020, and met only twice, and there has been no active engagement with Outcome Groups. The Human Rights-Based Approach is not clearly reflected and translated at the Government policy level. Meanwhile, CSOs claim that Civil Society has a more curtailed space than before, and that human rights have been threatened by the restrictive measures taken during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded everybody the importance of human rights and Human Rights-Based Approach in all sectors.

The current UNDAF has not identified precisely the vulnerable groups for addressing the principle Leave No One Behind. During the UNDAF implementation, the Leave No One Behind has been discussed on an ad-hoc basis. The groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities, LGBTIs, ethnic minorities, and people in prisons have hardly been covered by UN interventions. Other sensitive issues include GBV and sexual violence against children. There is an important need to address these sensitive issues, through structured discussions with Government, development partners, academia, and CSOs. The indicators were not disaggregated by vulnerable groups to see if these groups benefitted from the UNDAF. Moreover, poverty and inequality have been even more exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that more situations of vulnerability need to be taken into consideration.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) has been taken into account in the UNDAF design and implementation of all outcomes, especially Outcome 3. Nonetheless, there have been no organic links and active engagement between Outcome Groups and the Gender Theme Group. The latter played and can play an important role to encourage discussions on issues related to gender. The group can facilitate a joint UN response to these issues, which capitalize on the different comparative advantages of each agency. With worrisome trends on gender inequalities and GBV due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are opportunities for an increased attention to GEWE. There is also a need to focus on men when the gender gap is discussed, e.g., the significant gap in male and female life expectancies, and the role boys and men can play in GEWE.

The Operational Management Team advanced common business operations to ensure greater economy of scale and reduce operations costs through common business processes in procurement. Transaction costs have decreased thanks to the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT), through a common operational framework for transferring cash to government and non-governmental partners. With the common back-office initiative, which is part of the UN reform efficiency agenda, transaction costs have the potential to further decrease.

The UNDAF is supposed to be a resource mobilization tool for the Government and the UN, however, it is not supported by an integrated funding framework, and there are no adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda. In addition to the

Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other Thematic Funds, potential areas for additional resource mobilization include South-South Cooperation, Public Private Partnerships, and government investment funds. In addition, the government financial contribution will also be needed for the next UNSDCF.

### **Proposed recommendations**

#### **Recommendations with higher priority:**

1. The UNCT and government should improve the design and usefulness of the next UNSDCF as an instrument to capture a shared vision and mission in the context of the SDGs.
2. The government should strengthen its ownership and strategic management of the next UNSDCF.
3. UN agencies should implement the UNSDCF and increase their cooperation through the Outcome and Thematic Groups and use them to help the UNCT managing the UNSDCF strategically, with the RC/UNCT leadership.
4. The UNCT should ensure greater mainstreaming of the UNSDCF guiding principle Leave No One Behind and the Human Rights-Based Approach under the leadership of the RC.
5. The UNCT should ensure a greater mainstreaming of the UNSDCF guiding principle on gender equality and women's empowerment.
6. The UNCT and the Government should contemplate creating an integrated funding framework in the next UNSDCF, and adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda.

#### **Recommendations with medium priority:**

1. The UNCT should promote effective partnerships and strategic alliances around outcome areas, and with a variety of stakeholders, in order to enhance UNSDCF effectiveness.
2. The UNCT is invited to strengthen joint programming, resource mobilization and implement joint targeted programmes, while taking into account geographic spread of UN interventions, integrated programming, and geographical targeting experiences.
3. The UNCT and government should strengthen their use of effective Results-Based Management (RBM) and M&E systems to strategically monitor and manage the UNSDCF.
4. The UNCT, the National Statistics Office, and ministries should strengthen collaboration in view of improving national capacities for disaggregated data collection, analysis, dissemination and use, especially given their importance for measuring progress on the SDGs and next UNSDCF implementation.
5. The UNCT and the Government should strengthen the sustainability of the UNSDCF.
6. The UNCT should continue its efforts to reduce transaction costs where possible.

#### **Recommendations with lower priority:**

1. The UNCT should create an enabling environment for the participation and involvement of UN Non-Resident Agencies in UNSDCF processes, and these agencies should participate to the UNSDCF in a sustained effort.

2. The UNCT should Communicate as One through the United Nations' Country Communications Group, and internally, there should be more organic links between this group and Outcome and Thematic Groups.

This evaluation report and these recommendations will be followed by a mandatory management response and action plan prepared by the Evaluation Steering Committee.

## I. Introduction

This report presents findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent evaluation of the GoM and UNDAF (2017-2022). It is based on the Evaluation ToR and the Inception Report, which were previously prepared and approved by the Evaluation Consultative Group and the UNDAF Steering Committee. See **Annex 15: Terms of Reference for the UNDAF evaluation**.

The UNDAF 2017-2022<sup>1</sup> was developed in alignment with the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision (SDV) 2030, which was the country's long-term strategic policy document. The UNDAF was signed by 14 UN Agencies and described the collective response of the UN system to national development priorities. It reflected the comparative advantage of the UN by emphasizing the thematic competence of UN agencies involved, without necessarily highlighting their specific mandates. The current UNDAF was built around three strategic outcome areas, as follows:

<b>Outcome 1:</b> Promoting inclusive growth and sustainable management of natural resources
<b>Outcome 2:</b> Enhancing social protection and utilization of quality and equitable social services
<b>Outcome 3:</b> Fostering voice and strengthening accountability

Under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), the UNCT (United Nations Country Team) in Mongolia is responsible for the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of the UNDAF, in partnership with the GoM, and in collaboration with civil society, private sector, academia and development partners.

The evaluation is considered a steppingstone, in preparation for the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) cycle. It will suggest ways in which the next UNSDCF could continue supporting the country in the future in integration with the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The evaluation, which covers the period of January 2017 to September 2021, will assess the UNDAF:

- A. Relevance and adaptability: Is the UNDAF doing the right things?
- B. Effectiveness: Is the UNDAF achieving its objectives?
- C. Sustainability and orientation towards impact: Will the benefits last? What difference does the UNDAF make?
- D. Coherence and coordination: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?
- E. Efficiency: How well are resources being used?
- F. Crosscutting principles: Have we left no one behind?

The evaluation provides the UNDAF Steering Committee and UN agencies an opportunity to reflect collectively on the contribution of the UN System to the development change, on the basis of the expected UNDAF outcomes, identifying the enabling factors and specific UN interventions that may have contributed to any observable result change.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mongolia.un.org/en/12511-united-nations-development-assistance-framework-2017-2021>

The evaluation was commissioned by the UNDAF Steering Committee, with the support of the UNCT, UN Agencies, Outcome Groups and the national counterparts. It was conducted by the Independent Research Institute of Mongolia (IRIM), with a team of three consultants (an international and two national) between August 2021 and January 2022.

### Purpose, Objectives and Scope

As stated in the ToR, the independent evaluation of the UNDAF 2017-2022 serves two main purposes:

- i. Support **greater accountability of the UN system** for working effectively and in alignment with *UN programming principles* to contribute to agreed results in the UNDAF 2017-2022. By objectively reviewing and verifying results achieved within the UNDAF and assessing the *sustainability* and *synergies* of the strategies and interventions used, the evaluation will enable the various stakeholders in the UNDAF process, including the UNCT, national counterparts and development partners to be accountable for fulfilling their roles and commitments.
- ii. Promote **learning from the experience of implementing the current UNDAF 2017-2022** about what works, what doesn't and why. This includes providing lessons learned on what the added value of UN has been and could be in the future, especially considering the changing development landscape and emerging new actors, and how the UN adapts to the changing environment in Mongolia. It should therefore take into consideration not only what is covered in the UNDAF, but also examine which aspects are not covered although they are relevant to the current and future context, including aspects related to the SDGs.
- iii. Provide **clear, actionable, strategic and programmatic recommendations**, in priority order, that will inform the next UNSDCF cycle. This includes recommendations for improving the contribution of the UNCT to Mongolia's development priorities, which can be considered for the next UNSDCF and taking into consideration the SDGs achievements at the top level. The evaluation process provides the UNCT an opportunity to reflect on the way they have been supporting the country's development process.

In terms of scope, this is the final evaluation of the current cycle of the UNDAF (2017-2022), and it covered the implementation period from January 2017 up to September 2021. The consultants therefore reviewed the results achieved during the last four years and nine months of the UNDAF implementation. This is not ideal since the implementation of the UNDAF will continue up to December 2022, however, the timeframe of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) roadmap and UNSDCF guidelines towards a new UNSDCF requires the UNCT to conduct this evaluation at this time, the penultimate year of the UNDAF cycle.

The scope of the evaluation also covered all programmes and projects implemented by UN resident and non-resident agencies under the UNDAF outcomes, including the COVID-19 Socio Economic Response Plan (SERP). The activities of agencies without a formal country programme, activities implemented as part of global or regional programmes and projects, and the activities implemented by non-resident agencies were also considered.

In terms of the actors' scope, evidence and findings of the evaluation embraced the views of key stakeholders. In terms of geographic scope, the evaluation dealt with all levels of implementation of the UNDAF, both national and sub-national. In terms of programmatic scope, it covered the 3 outcomes and 12 outputs.

## Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation assesses the level of achievement of both expected and unexpected results by examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors, and causality using appropriate criteria such as **relevance and adaptability, effectiveness, sustainability and orientation towards impact, coherence and coordination, and efficiency**. It also analyzes the conformity to **crosscutting programming principles**. For the complete list of evaluation questions, see **Annex 2: List of evaluation criteria and questions**.

## Structure of the evaluation report

This evaluation report was prepared with the guidance provided by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)<sup>2</sup>, including the UNEG Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (September 2021).<sup>3</sup> For more details on guidance used, see the Methodology part of this report (section on evaluation guidance).

This report presents the Country Context, a description of the UNDAF (2017-2022), the Evaluation Context, the Methodology, the Evaluation Findings, as well as the Conclusions, Recommendations, and the Limitations and Lessons Learned. It is complemented by numerous annexes, which present complementary information and tools that were used during the evaluation.

# II. Country Context and the UNDAF

## Country context

Mongolia had made significant strides towards sustainable development.<sup>4</sup> The country has established the institutional mechanisms to oversee implementation of the SDGs and adopted its long-term vision document that, along with its international human and labour rights commitments, provides a roadmap for achievement of the sustainable development in the country. The country held the parliamentary elections in June 2020 with a new government formed. However, the government had to resign following the peaceful protests in January 2021 which led to changes in the Cabinet. The new government that includes leaders from a younger generation, from the same ruling Mongolian People's Party, demonstrated more decisive actions to address the COVID-19 crisis as a broader and integrated challenge using a combination of containment policies and economic recovery policies in addition to already existing social welfare measures. Yet, structural weaknesses, including governance challenges, continue to be persistent and threaten progress towards the SDGs achievement.

Despite efforts in maintaining macroeconomic stability after the economic difficulties in 2016-2017, Mongolia's economic growth has been volatile and remained factor driven. The high dependency on instable mining sector and mineral resources endowment at the cost of very few job opportunities and value addition in non-mining sectors has made the country vulnerable to shocks, such as the decline of copper and coal prices and inconsistent demand from China. Unemployment remains high and quality of available jobs is low, leading many rural households to move to the urban areas and many young

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<sup>2</sup> Key UNEG Guidance includes Frequently Asked Questions for UNDAF Evaluations, UNEG, 2010; Quality Checklist for Evaluation TOR and Inception Reports, UNEG, 2010; Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports, UNEG, 2010; UNEG Guidance on Preparing TORs for UNDAF Evaluations, 2012; and Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation, UNEG Guide, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> [Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework](#), United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), September 2021.

<sup>4</sup> This context section was inspired by the CCA, after discussions with the UNCT, given that it is the most updated text on context. See Common Country Analysis, Mongolia, United Nations, Mongolia, October 2021.

and educated Mongolians to work abroad. Debt vulnerability is amongst the highest in Asia and the Pacific region, posing risks to the country's financial sustainability. The added pressure brought about by the pandemic has further compounded the macroeconomic environment, and impacted livelihoods and social wellbeing.

Since early 1990s, Mongolia gradually made great inroads towards democracy with a vibrant civil society and relatively free media. However, these have been undermined by political instability and significant systemic and structural challenges. Government institutions are challenged by weak accountability mechanisms, while effective administration of justice is hampered by limited institutional capacity and the limited application of the rule of law. Pervasive corruption and allegations of mismanagement of public funds continue to permeate. Despite the acclamation of the elections being peaceful, they are still characterized by heightened political tension, and diminishing social cohesion. The government's strict restrictions related to the pandemic have also caused frustrations in the Mongolian society, raising concerns around fundamental rights and freedoms.

Climate change is one of the key factors that threatens sustainable development in Mongolia. The projected increase in the frequency and severity of climate related natural disasters, such as dzuds, droughts, floods, windstorms and sand and dust storms, is expected to have an adverse impact on agriculture and livestock, water and land resources, infrastructure development, human health, well-being and survival, and often causing displacement as for many people migration remains the preferred coping mechanism. While the Government announced the new ambitious carbon emissions targets, the current fossil fuel subsidies continue to encourage overconsumption of coal and investment in renewable energy and green development remains at a very low level. Mongolia suffers from heavy air and water pollution, especially in its urban areas, affecting public health, in particular children and maternal health, and results in an increase incidence of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Also, the livestock population tripled since the nineties when Mongolia embarked on market economy. It vastly exceeds the carrying land capacity and has resulted in severe overgrazing and land degradation that highlights the urgent need for better livestock management.

Despite strides towards social inclusion, more than a quarter of the Mongolians remains monetary poor, food insecure and the most vulnerable groups continue to face barriers in accessing social services, including education, health, food, sanitation services, protection from harm and violence, public representation, and public infrastructure. Intergenerational transmission of poverty and vulnerability remains as major concern and children are consistently more likely to be found poor both monetary and other deprivation dimensions. Rapid uncontrolled urbanization caused the expansion of *ger areas*<sup>5</sup>, which represent structural concentrations of poverty and vulnerability. Since 2015, there has been stagnation in prevalence of undernourishment and food insecurity levels despite positive economic growth. While Mongolia is outperforming its regional peers on gender development indicators, female participation in labour force and politics is relatively low. COVID-19 has further increased already high inequality in income, wealth, and access to education which risks becoming long-lasting legacies of the crisis. The pandemic also exacerbated the challenges of the marginalized groups who are most at risk of being left behind, including children; women and girls; persons with disabilities (PWDs); youth; ethnic minorities; residents of ger area; informal workers; victims of trafficking; and stranded and unregistered migrants, impeding their participation and contribution to the country's sustainable development.

The interconnected nature of the political, economic, social and environmental challenges necessitates a multi-dimensional and well-coordinated approach to accelerate progress towards the sustainable development. The structural challenges and underlying causes of poverty and inequality in Mongolia need to be addressed in a decisive and sustainable manner during the Decade of Action, while ensuring inclusion of the most vulnerable populations.

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<sup>5</sup> Fringe sectors of the capital Ulaanbaatar and other urban areas in Mongolia where internal migrants tend to settle

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the underlying challenges of sustainable development in Mongolia, by pushing the government to prioritize financial resources for the immediate health and socio-economic response<sup>6</sup>, which have significantly reduced a fiscal space for development investments. Yet, it also created opportunities for economic diversification, digitalization, regional cooperation, improving emergency preparedness of education and health sectors. The Vision-2050 provides a framework for the GoM and its partners to implement strategic and inclusive programmes in a better integrated and coordinated way and in line with the SDGs, with availability of adequate financial resources and monitoring mechanisms. Success of the SDG implementation will also depend on further commitment to improve governance and increase institutional capacity to deliver on the adopted laws and policies and ensure that no one left behind, as well as engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including all levels of government, parliamentarians, private sector, civil society, workers' and employers' organizations, development partners and stakeholders, to ensure that the Mongolia's development path is sustainable and leaves no one behind.

### United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2017-2022)

The UNDAF 2017-2022 in Mongolia, which was formulated via inclusive and participatory processes, is aligned with the national development planning process and priorities expressed in the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030 as well as the SDGs. It underscores a strong partnership between the GoM and the UN to join efforts towards the achievement of national development priorities, the SDGs and compliance with normative standards.

The UNDAF 2017-2021 was extended by one year, and it will be completed by end of 2022. The main reason for the extension was to quickly adapt interventions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UNDAF focuses on three strategic priority areas: (Outcome 1) Promoting inclusive growth and sustainable management of natural resources; (Outcome 2) Enhancing social protection and utilization of quality and equitable social services; and (Outcome 3) Fostering voice and strengthening accountability. The interventions under the three strategic priority areas include but are not limited to the following:

- Under Outcome 1, UN Agencies provide support the implementation of Mongolia's Vision 2030 notably through poverty reduction, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), the building of resilience with a particular focus on ecosystems and livelihoods. It is anticipated that under this Outcome, communities and individuals will be better able to deal with environmental and economic hardships, through being equipped with new, relevant and diverse sets of skills, capacities and capabilities. This outcome also supports the implementation of the SDGs.
- Outcome 2 focuses on better social protection and quality and equitable basic social services, with a special focus on water, sanitation and hygiene. The UN interventions will directly support the implementation of Mongolia's Vision 2030, notably addressing poverty, promoting healthy lives and well-being, along with the education goal and the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Outcome 3 focuses on ensuring that all the peoples of Mongolia benefit from sustainable development and that the poor and marginalized are heard and reached first. The UN will support Mongolia's democratic institutions to deliver services with mutual accountability and greater transparency, leading to a more inclusive society where human rights are promoted, protected and realized. Particular attention will be paid to the recommendations made in

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<sup>6</sup> Overall, investments in human rights and social protection during shocks provide a solid foundation for recovery and help mitigate the challenges of sustainable development. For example, a study of 8 countries shows that an investment of 1% of GDP in social protection policies has a multiplier effect on GDP of between 0.7 and 1.9. Development Pathways 2021, Investment in social protection and their impacts on economic growth.

Mongolia's UPR and the recommendations from the reports relating to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The results framework of the UNDAF 2017-2022 outlines **3 outcomes** and **12 outputs** that respond to country needs and make use of the UN's comparative advantages. According to the UNDAF document, the outputs should be made operational through the development of Joint biannual rolling Work Plans (JWPs).

While the outputs were mentioned in the UNDAF document, they were specified, and their wording improved in the 2017 UNDAF Annual Report. Using this wording, the outputs are the following:

- **OUTCOME AREA 1: Promoting Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources**
- **OUTCOME STATEMENT 1: By 2021, poor and vulnerable people are more resilient to shocks, and benefit from inclusive growth and a healthy ecosystem**
  - ❖ Output 1.1: Visions, strategies and plans that integrate the SDGs are developed and focus on poverty reduction, inclusive growth, economic diversification and resilience at the national and local level.
  - ❖ Output 1.2: Fostering people-based climate change adaptation and mitigation approaches are tailored to the Mongolian context, including national green economy strategies that create jobs and skills, promote clean technologies, prevent environmental risks and reduce poverty.
  - ❖ Output 1.3: Protection of ecosystem services that support the livelihoods of the rural poor and vulnerable is strengthened.
  - ❖ Output 1.4: Resilient communities able to mitigate disaster risks are built.
- **OUTCOME AREA 2: Enhancing Social Protection and Utilization of Quality and Equitable Social Services**
- **OUTCOME STATEMENT 2: By 2021, the poor and vulnerable population benefit from better social protection and are able to increasingly utilize quality and equitable basic social services, with a special focus on water, sanitation and hygiene.**
  - ❖ Output 2.1: Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) services are improved in selected peri-urban areas and soums, through equitable access to technology, water and sanitation facilities; supported by a more enabling environment, evidence base and social awareness.
  - ❖ Output 2.2: The health system is strengthened to increase the health of the poor and vulnerable in urban/peri-urban/rural areas; ensure equitable access to quality health care; and promote evidence-based policies and decision-making, in partnership with national institutions.
  - ❖ Output 2.3: Higher quality basic education is supported, with greater access to early childhood development and lifelong education in selected peri-urban areas and soums.
  - ❖ Output 2.4: An efficient and effective social protection system is facilitated for all and substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.
  - ❖ Output 2.5: Food and nutrition security is strengthened (support healthy food/diet environment, reduce double burden of malnutrition, strengthen food and nutrition surveillance system and services).
- **OUTCOME AREA 3: Fostering Voice and Strengthening Accountability**

- **OUTCOME STATEMENT 3: By 2021, governing institutions are more responsive and accountable to people, while ensuring effective participation of young persons and realization of the rights of all, especially the poor and marginalized**
  - ❖ Output 3.1: Normative protection mechanisms are improved by revising laws in line with international standards while establishing or enhancing monitoring systems – to ensure human rights, especially of the poor and marginalized with attention to GBV.
  - ❖ Output 3.2: Representation of women and young people is increased – up to 34 years – in decision-making, such as Parliament, Ministries, state secretariats, local government and local representations.
  - ❖ Output 3.3: Youth networks and organizations are strengthened and effectively participating in expressing their voices as equal partners.

According to the UNDAF document, outcome level work should be led by inter-agency Outcome Results Groups, which were responsible for developing biennial rolling JWPs, including their implementation, monitoring, and reporting with Implementing Partners, under the guidance of UN Country Team and the Joint GoM/UN Steering Committee (JSC) that should provide formal oversight and management direction. The JSC is co-chaired by Minister of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the GoM and the UN Resident Coordinator.

For Outcome Area 1, UNDP is a UN Lead Agency and the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Environment and Tourism were the Government Coordinating Authorities. UNICEF is the UN Lead Agency for Outcome Area 2, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is supposed to be a Government Coordinating Authority for Outcome Area 2. UNFPA serves as the UN Lead Agency for Outcome Area 3 and supposed to work with National Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and National Committee for Gender Equality as Government Coordinating Authorities.

It was expected that each of the Outcome Results Groups would systematically document the lessons learned from the work delivered as well as good practices for the benefit of all partners and the other work of the UN. Annual UN Mongolia Country Results Reports are produced that reflect the UNDAF implementation.<sup>7</sup>

The UN in Mongolia has also incorporated five key programming principles in the UNDAF. These principles are universal, based on law, emphasize accountability, and are relevant to the cooperation between the UN, the GoM and other development partners. There are three normative principles human rights and HRBA, gender equality and environmental sustainability along with two enabling principles: capacity development and RBM.

Some Thematic Groups support the UNCT in the implementation of the UNDAF: (i) the Gender Group; (ii) the Human Rights Group; and (iii) the Youth Group. In addition, three Working Groups are functioning: (iv) the Operations Management Team; (v) the Country Communications Group; and (vi) the M&E Working Group. The key partners in the implementation of the UNDAF are the Government, the Parliament Secretariat, Cabinet Secretariat, Deputy Prime Minister's Office and line Ministries, , development partners, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector.

The Current UNDAF was signed by 14 UN Agencies: UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, IAEA, ILO, UNAIDS, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNEP, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, and UNV. A total 16 UN Agencies and

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<sup>7</sup> UNCT (2021), UN Country Results Report Mongolia 2017-2020; UNRCO (2020), 2017-2019 UN Mongolia Country Results Report; UNRCO (2019), UN Mongolia Country Results Report 2017-2018; UN Mongolia (2018), 2017 UN Mongolia Country Results Report

Programmes (together with WFP and UN-SPIDER (Officer for Outer Space Affairs)) have cumulatively contributed to the implementation of the current UNDAF, under the leadership of the RC.<sup>8</sup> Current Resident Agencies include UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, FAO, ILO, IOM, UNIDO, UN-Habitat and UNHCR. Current non-resident Agencies include IAEA, UNEP, UNESCO, and UN ESCAP.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

#### Stakeholder mapping and engagement modes

The UNDAF evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner, ensuring the participation and involvement of UN agencies and key stakeholders (government officials, CSOs, private sector, academia and development partners) in the different phases of the evaluation.

The systematic purposive sampling was used to identify groups and stakeholders to be consulted. The selection was informed by the portfolio analysis and comprehensive stakeholder mapping undertaken during the inception phase of the evaluation. This included an analysis of the UN intervention geographical coverage and funding sources per outcome and associated outputs. The participatory and utilization-focused approach allowed to incorporate the views of the various stakeholders, through questionnaires, meetings and individual interviews, as well as a Stakeholder workshop to present preliminary findings and recommendations.

#### Data sources and data collection

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was conducted remotely, and the data collection plan was adjusted accordingly. Information from the different lines of inquiry was triangulated to improve the reliability of the findings, and to ensure that the recommendations are well grounded and implementable. The methodology was the following:

- Preparation meetings and inception report
- Desk review of written sources
- Stakeholder's mapping, analysis and sampling
- Analysis of the Theory of Change
- Exploratory meeting with the UN Chairs of the Outcome Groups
- List of Questions for, and meetings with Outcome Groups
- List of Questions for, and meetings with Thematic and Working Groups
- Virtual meetings or interviews with key informants
- Analysis of the programming principles
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations at Stakeholder and Prioritization Workshop
- Report drafting.

The normative criteria were addressed as a specific criterion, with specific questions. First, the evaluation paid particular attention to how the Human Rights-Based Approach was mainstreamed in the UNDAF design. The evaluation also assessed the extent to which key Human Rights-Based Approach features were mainstreamed in the UNDAF implementation, through the same sources of information: the desk review, questionnaires, meetings and interviews of key actors (including of the Human Rights Thematic Group). The evaluation also assessed how the UNDAF document and implementation used the Leave

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<sup>8</sup> Country Results Report 2017-2020, UNCT (2021), page 35.

<sup>9</sup> See the [UN Country Results Report 2017-2020](#).

No One Behind principle to address the root causes of inequity and strengthen programming to effectively achieve results for the most vulnerable groups.

Similarly, the evaluation was also gender sensitive and responsive, and assessed how GEWE were included in the UNDAF design, and in its implementation. The questionnaires, interviews and meetings (including of the Gender Thematic Group), contained questions to assess gender and GEWE. These, combined with the desk review, allowed a good triangulation of information and validation of findings. The the data collection process also paid attention to a gender-balanced selection of interviewees.

The data collection was successful, since the evaluation team organized 47 interviews or meetings or received questionnaire replies, out of 52 that were solicited. This was achieved thanks to a diligent effort from the Evaluation Team with individual contacts established with all these actors to ensure their participation. Out of 92 participants in the evaluation, the overwhelming majority were women (72) and less participants were men (24). This is due to the fact that many women work for UN agencies.

### Data analysis

The consultants triangulated the information for all the evaluation criteria and questions. They read all the available documents, analysed the written responses to the questionnaires, and the notes taken during the meetings and interviews. In particular, they prepared a Summary report, which was a compilation of evidence from the data collection, based on the questionnaire replies and the interviews notes. Then they prepared an Analysis report, which was a synthesis of the Summary report, which started to provide some answers to the evaluation questions, based on the relevant questionnaires' replies and interviews' replies. This was further triangulated with other sources of information that helped the evaluation team to draft the Evaluation Report.

### Governance

The IRIM evaluation team performed under the overall guidance of, and in close collaboration with, the evaluation management structure: first, the Evaluation Steering Committee, co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and a government representative; second the Consultative Group, which consists of representatives from Parliament Secretariat, Cabinet Secretariat, National Statistics Office, National Development Agency, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, and the Evaluation Manager (from the RCOs); third, the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific (UNEDAP); and fourth, the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO). For more information, see **Annex 1: Detailed methodology**.

## IV. Evaluation Findings

### A. Relevance and adaptability: Is the UNDAF doing the right things?

#### 1. National development priorities and alignment to the SDGs

**Evaluation Question (EQ):** To what extent has the UN system supported the achievement of national development priorities, goals, and targets, in alignment with relevant national plans and frameworks, such as the long-term development policy Vision-2050, the General Guideline for the Development of Mongolia 2021-2025, and the Government Action Plan 2020-2024 with its implementation plan?

**Finding:** Evidence shows that the UNDAF was aligned with the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030, which very well reflected the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Approximately 80 per cent of SDG targets are in line with the national strategies: Vision 2050, the Five-Year Development Guidelines for 2021–2025, and the Government Action Programme for 2020–2024. However, an assessment showed gaps related to the SDGs. Out of 169 targets, 11 to 20 targets of the SDGs are not aligned with the selected national strategies. The approval of the localized SDG targets and indicators is on the way. Also, government policies are not always inclusive, and equity focused; in which case they are not fully aligned with the UNDAF guiding principles.

As mentioned in the Country Context of this report, Mongolia has articulated its development vision in “Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030”, (referred to as the “Vision 2030”), which was approved by Parliament in February 2016. Developed during the same period as this UNDAF, strong efforts were made by the UN in Mongolia to ensure that the priority work within the UNDAF aligned with Mongolia’s vision for sustainable development. This Vision was based on the global SDGs.

According to the Rapid Integrated Assessment of the Alignment between Mongolia’s National Development Plans and Policy and the SDGs<sup>10</sup>, approximately 80 per cent of SDG targets are in line with the national strategies: Vision 2050, the Five-Year Development Guidelines for 2021–2025, and the Government Action Programme for 2020–2024. However, the analysis showed gaps related to the SDGs. Out of 169 targets, 11 to 20 targets of the SDGs are not aligned with the selected national strategies. These gaps should be analyzed to identify the reasons for the targets are 'not aligned'. Furthermore, those targets should be reflected in future mid-term development policy documents.

The SDGs rapid assessment recommended that an integrated assessment should be undertaken to align local strategies with the SDGs, including indicators to achieve the SDGs at the local level. Meanwhile, the UN continued its SDG localization initiatives with Ulaanbaatar city, Orkhon and Zavkhan aimags to integrate SDGs in local development policies, and prioritize the most pressing challenges in meeting the SDGs in line with the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’. The UN developed a methodology on integrating SDGs in budget preparation and monitoring process, with the Ministry of Health (with the Asian Development Bank (ADB)), Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry and Ministry of Finance. The support ensured that budget passed in 2019 for the Ministry of Environment was more comprehensively aligned with the SDGs. UNDP supported a coordination and finalization of Mongolia’s NDC document to be submitted to UNFCCC with which the country is raising its ambitions to reduce its GHG emissions from an initial 14% to 22.7% by 2030.

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<sup>10</sup> Rapid Integrated Assessment of the Alignment between Mongolia’s National Development Plans and Policy and the SDGs. Key Observations, Findings and Recommendations, Report, Government of Mongolia, UNDP, 2021, page 17.

Both UN agencies and development partners acknowledged the shift in Government priorities in the course of the current UNDAF implementation. They noted that the Government adopted Vision 2050, with limited reference to the SDGs, without previously evaluating the Vision 2030. Only the RC was formally consulted, who shared the text (initially in Mongolian) with UN agencies. Once the document was informally translated, the UN had very limited time to provide comments (about one week) on a very big document with 270 pages. Furthermore, development partners were not involved and consulted. This consultation process is not a usual way of proceeding in other countries for strategic documents of this importance. The UN agencies, development partners, international and national NGOs, and other actors, should have all been involved.

Government policies are not inclusive and equity focused (for instance the decrease in handing child cash transfers). The UN tries to influence such policies, through the provision of technical support and data/evidence generation. In these cases, the government priorities are not always aligned with UN principles. The SDGs rapid assessment also noted that the country context matters. For instance, the word "poverty" is avoided and not used in all the selected policy documents. However, there are many targets and activities in these policy documents, which have clear and significant contributions to reducing poverty and increasing the middle class.

On the other hand, the government interviewees acknowledged the UN system has been always supportive of the achievement of national development priorities, goals, and targets, as national plans and frameworks are well aligned with the SDGs. For instance, the Vision-2050 aims at a green, climate-resilient and competitive agriculture sector. The UN has been supporting this priority. The UNDAF also supported the Article 4.2.7 of the Government Action Plan 2020-2024, which aims to "develop a national system for human rights and gender education for all and pursue a policy to ensure gender equality", and the article 4.2.8 which aims to "increase the representation of women in decision-making levels and provide equal opportunities for women to effectively participate and lead in all spheres of political, economic and social life". The UN interventions promoting gender equality and the participation of women at the decision-making level are in line with these articles. Even though there are strategies and plans in place, the Government has no clear roadmap on how to properly implement them due to the inadequate national capacity. Thus, Government interviewees emphasized that the enforcement of policies and frameworks is vital.

Unfortunately, private sector actors are not much involved in UNDAF implementation, with a few exceptions. It is not clear for the private sector how they could ensure their participation in the implementation of the SDGs or other long-term policies of the country due to limited engagement of the government with private sector on development and coordination issues.

## **2. Response to emerging and unforeseen needs, and adaptability of the UNDAF**

**EQ: To what extent has the UN system remained responsive to emerging and unforeseen needs of the country and the people? To what extent has the UN system collectively prioritized activities based on the needs (demand side, i.e., COVID-19 pandemic) rather than on the availability of resources (supply side), and to what extent has the UN system reallocated resources according to the collective priorities if necessary? Can you highlight the role of the UN in the development of the national COVID-19 recovery strategy, and in other activities?**

**Finding: The UN has adapted its work and responded to the emerging and unforeseen needs of the country. The most prominent example is undoubtedly the UN collective response to COVID-19. However, there are frequent changes of Government in Mongolia, and the context evolves rapidly, presenting challenges for retention of institutional knowledge and continuity of UNDAF implementation.**

Overall, the UN has adapted its work and responded to the emerging and unforeseen needs of the country. The UNDAF focused on three outcome areas that were the most relevant when it was designed, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the reality has changed and evolved, and the UN had to adapt. While some projects and programmes adapted due to the health crisis, no changes were made to the UNDAF, as it is broad enough to accommodate these situations. However, there are frequent changes of Government in Mongolia, and the context evolves rapidly, which present challenges for the retention of institutional knowledge and continuity of UNDAF implementation. This raises the question for UN agencies of whether it should change or stay focused on its usual work.

First, the UN played a key role to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the overall leadership of the RC, and the technical lead of UNDP, the UNCT collectively developed the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP), which is seen as an added engagement to the integral part of the UNDAF. The assessment of the COVID-19 impact was really comprehensive and provided valuable data and scenario analysis. There was also a reallocation of funding from existing programmes to prioritize the UN COVID-19 response, in addition to the resource mobilization by mapping and re-programming the UNDAF interventions. All UN agencies prioritized COVID response actions in their programme areas, and identified gaps to be addressed in Mongolia, as stated as part of the SERP. In 2020, the UN mobilized 27.4 million USD for COVID-19 pandemic response, through the humanitarian coordination.<sup>11</sup> Based on the data and findings from the SERP, the Government planned and implemented some stimulus packages.

The UN also supported the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Secretariat with the development of the new action plan for COVID recovery which was included in the GAP. The Government still did not develop a separate COVID-19 recovery strategy but integrated some elements in its longer-term planning documents, while only focusing on immediate response.

Second, the UN pivoted towards the COVID response in many specific areas during the pandemic. The points below are not exhaustive, but they show the adaptability of the UNDAF, as indicated in the documents and interviews during the evaluation.

- The UN extended their support to the education sector to ensure education continuity during school closures, bearing in mind the education priorities, such as the quality of education and inclusion. The UN addressed human rights issues, especially violence against children and improved the capacity of one-stop service centres and protective shelters for GBV/DV victims.
- The UN conducted a rapid assessment of COVID 19 on GBV situation of Mongolia to identify the immediate needs of response to mitigate the consequences of COVID 19 on GBV. In responding to the emerging increase of DV related crime, the UN provided financial and technical support to establish two new One Stop Service Centers (OSSCs) in UB city ger district areas of Sukhbaatar and Chingeltei district to protect women and children from domestic violence and provide necessary protection and immediate services. In addition, the UN advocated with the State Emergency Commission to include the existing OSSCs and shelters for victims of violence into the essential service list to allow its operation during the lockdown period. Moreover, the UN provided hygiene and health product package (dignity kits) and PPEs for 17 OSSCs and 14 shelters operating throughout the country with two batches of supply.
- The UN initiated a pilot programme to increase child cash transfer to support their nutrition and build shock resilience in Zavkhan aimag. The UN supported the establishment of CP cluster during disaster and emergency situations headed by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to coordinate CP measures across the country during the pandemic. The UN developed and transferred the COVID portal/website to the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, in order

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<sup>11</sup> UN Country Results Report, Mongolia, 2017-2020

to timely monitor the health and economic situations and provide updates to stakeholders, including all COVID related studies and analysis. This effort went beyond the scope of the UNDAF.

- The UN has also raised funds through partnerships with the private sector, such as \$602,000 from Rio Tinto LLC to establish four nationwide polymerase chain reaction (PCR) laboratories to increase access to the COVID diagnostics and remote care during the pandemic.
- With the support of the UN, the National Statistical Office conducted important research on COVID's impact and risk assessment on children, to support evidence-based policy making. Furthermore, under the initiative and leadership of the UN, the National Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance and National University of Mongolia conducted a study on the effect of COVID on inequality and poverty using big data in 2021.
- In terms of coordination, while the UN's role was praised by some development partners, others consider that there was a duplication of coordination mechanisms: A Health Cluster and the COVID Coordination Group created for COVID's response.

In non-COVID areas, the UNCT also remained responsive through the humanitarian coordination, especially during the harsh wintertime emergency (dzuds) in 2017-2018. Due to COVID-19 and extreme winter and spring weather, the livelihood of herders worsened and the UN provided food assistance amounted to USD 300,000 to about 1,000 herders in a timely manner.

The UN also assisted the government for longer term readiness for other disasters with international expertise (diagnostic capacity for Help Centre for further emergencies, infections and viruses, check-ups, basic hygiene kits).

### **3. Key issues and development challenges and relevance to international commitments**

**EQ: To what extent has the UN system addressed key issues and development challenges identified by the previous UN Common Country Assessment in the achievement of the SDGs and the country's international human rights commitments?**

**Finding: The UNDAF addressed key issues identified by the Common Country Assessment (CCA), and their underlying causes and challenges, for example, GBV (particularly domestic violence). The UNDAF document also reflected international commitments expressed in internationally agreed goals and human rights norms, and standards. The UN assisted policymakers in strengthening the existing legal framework to help the country meet these commitments. The UNDAF also reflected the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

The UN system addressed key issues and development challenges identified by the UN CCA that could help achieve the SDGs and the country's international human rights commitments.

The previous CCA identified GBV, particularly domestic violence (DV), to be a key issue; especially the existing legal framework which needs to meet international standards and requirements. Other issues and challenges that were identified by the CCA include: men's issues including life expectancy and training for perpetrators of DV, and women's political empowerment. These issues were all addressed in the UNDAF.

The UNDAF document, prepared in 2016, reflected the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was developed in 2015, building on the MDGs and broader Millennium Declaration. The 2030 Agenda was endorsed at a high - level Special Summit in September 2015 in New York and required a new vision and a joined - up UN Development System response to ensure the system was "fit for purpose" in supporting sustainable development and delivering effectively at the country level.

The UNDAF document also reflected international commitments expressed in internationally agreed goals and human rights commitments, norms, and standards. It indicated that a particular attention would be paid to the recommendations made to the GoM, in the UPR and the recommendations from the reports relating to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The importance given to the internationally agreed goals and human rights commitments, norms and standards in the UNDAF and its implementation was confirmed by documents and through meetings and interviews, which specified that human rights, GEWE are fundamental principles that guided the UN's work through the support to core human rights treaties, and follow-up to recommendations from human rights mechanisms including treaty bodies, special rapporteurs, and the UPR. These issues are further examined in the Cross-cutting section of this report.

## **B. Effectiveness: Is the UNDAF achieving its objectives?**

### **1. Suitability of the indicators to measure progress**

**EQ: Can you validate the suitability of indicators and other verification tools used to measure progress towards results?**

**Finding: There is a need to take a closer look at the suitability of the results matrix and the indicators in the design of the upcoming UNSDCF. Some indicators are formulated in a way that does not allow for the effective M&E of results. Several indicators such as national poverty rate and unemployment rate are too high and too ambitious for the UN to make a significant contribution.**

The evaluation team cannot fully validate the suitability of indicators and other verification tools used to measure progress towards results, and the team observed the following, based on discussions with the Outcome Groups:

- There is a logical problem or mismatch between outcome statements, outputs (also called "results" in the UNDAF document), and indicators. For instance, the outputs are insufficiently defined or formulated to achieve the outcomes.
- The indicators have never been reviewed during the UNDAF implementation, and there has not been any verification exercise to validate the suitability of indicators.
- The impact level indicators such as national poverty rate and unemployment rate are beyond UN intervention.
- Other indicators are too broad and vague to report on them (for example indicator 3.3.2 "Civic participation which is listed in the RRF under Youth participation category").
- The output 1.1 (for instance) on development visions, strategies and plans that integrate the SDGs<sup>12</sup> do not have a direct effect on the outcome statement on inclusive growth and a healthy ecosystem.<sup>13</sup> They are supposed to have an indirect effect.

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<sup>12</sup> Output 1: Development visions, strategies and plans that integrate the SDGs and focused on poverty reduction, inclusive resource efficient economic growth, economic diversification and resilience at the national and local level (including supporting evidenced based policy making and collecting and analyzing sex- and other types of disaggregated data to inform impact analysis of these policies on specific population groups).

<sup>13</sup> Outcome statement. By 2021, poor and vulnerable people are more resilient to shocks, and benefit from inclusive growth and a healthy ecosystem.

- While Output 1.1 focuses on resilience at the national and local level, Output 1.4 aims to build resilient communities which are very similar outputs. Output 1.1 and Output 1.2 simultaneously require reporting on poverty and employment creation. Similarly, the interventions related to environment protection including air pollution and ecosystem and biodiversity conservation are unsystematically reported across Output 1.2-1.4. There was weak choice and formulation of the indicators for Output 1.1, as the output refers to a range of development issues such as poverty reduction, inclusive growth, economic diversification and resilience, while all four indicators measure only the progress on environmental aspects such as GHG emission, renewable energy, forestland, and protected area. The indicator for Output 1.2, share of manufacturing value added (MVA) in GDP, is not fitting to determine the extent of progress of the output as it does not capture the intended result of the output. The indicators for Output 1.3 and Output 1.4 are mixed. While Output 1.3 refers to ecosystem services that support the livelihoods of the rural poor and vulnerable, its indicator is disaster economic loss which may be more appropriate for Output 1.4. It is worthy to note that two indicators for Output 1.4 are seemingly at too high level to measure the UN contribution which focused on rural poor and vulnerable people.
- There are no indicators to measure the progress at the outcome level.
- Similarly, it is hard to show in the progress reports that project activities really contribute to outputs and outcomes.
- Some operational level efforts and contributions such as atomic agency interventions in health service and food security arena are not captured at the output level.
- Verification tools were insufficient.

The measurement of progress has therefore been a learning process for the UNCT staff, and there is now a greater awareness about the need to take a closer look at the suitability of the results matrix and the indicators in the design of the upcoming UNSDCF.

The evaluation team considers that it would be worthwhile to fully understand what Quality Assurance processes were in place during the planning phase from UN DCO and the regional peer support group of agencies, and how these processes helped the UNCT to address or not these fundamental design and planning issues. There were certainly weaknesses in the 2016 Interim and 2017 UNDAF Guidelines.

An indicators validation exercise / evaluability exercise could have been useful to ensure the suitability of the results matrix to measure results. A ToC would have been useful to ensure that the outputs were sufficient for the achievement of the Outcomes, with suitable indicators that can capture all the UN contributions. The evaluation team concludes that the next UNSDCF will need to be realistic in terms of outputs, outcomes, indicators and targets formulation, to ensure that the results can be measured and the contribution of the UN determined.

## **2. Achievement of the UNDAF outputs, including gaps**

**EQ: Please describe what outputs have been achieved for each UNDAF outcome? Where are the gaps with respect to what was expected? Were the outputs sufficient for the achievement of the Outcomes?**

The evaluation team summarized the outputs that have been achieved for each UNDAF outcome. The main source is the UN Country Results Report, Mongolia, 2017-2020, published in March 2021, which presents cumulative results for this period of four years. Other sources include the UN Country Results Reports, Mongolia, 2017-2019, 2017-2018, and 2017. This section is not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative. Many other sections in this report also discuss the achievement of results. **See Annex 8: Achievement of the UNDAF outputs.**

### 3. UN's plausible contribution to UNDAF outcomes

**EQ: What is the UN's plausible contribution to UNDAF outcomes (changes observed at national level, including changes in relevant statistical indicators)?**

Despite the issue raised about the suitability of indicators and other verification tools used to measure progress towards results, the team concludes that the UN contribution to UNDAF outcomes is plausible. Out of 35 indicators, the targets of 22 indicators are already achieved or on track. However, there are 5 indicators on which the UN is not able to report, because there is no baseline or no progress data available. There are also 8 stagnating and regress indicators.

Table 1. UNDAF M&E Framework -Current Progress of the Indicators as the end of 2020

	#	Indicators	Dashboards
1	1.1.1	Reduction of GHG emission from BAU scenario	
2	1.1.2	Increase in share of renewable in the national energy mix	
3	1.1.3	Forestland, mln ha (or percentage of Forest land in total area, %)	
4	1.1.4	Special protection area as proportion of total area	
5	1.2	Inclusive and sustainable industrialization for economic diversification - Share of manufacturing value added (MVA) in GDP	
6	1.3	Disaster impact - disaster economic loss	
7	1.4.1	Proportion of people living below poverty line (urban/rural, children)	
8	1.4.2	Unemployment rate (disaggregated by sex)	
9	2.1.1	Percentage of population using improved water sources	 (National target only)
10	2.1.2	Percentage of population using improved sanitation facilities	
11	2.2.1.1	Social health insurance coverage (disaggregated by geographical area, socio-economic quintiles and content)	
12	2.2.1.2	Benefit incidence analysis (disaggregated by gender, urban/rural, geographical area and socio-economic quintiles)	
13	2.2.2.1	Percentage of women who underwent antenatal check-ups at least 6 times during pregnancy	
14	2.2.2.2	Incidence rate of syphilis among youth from 15-24 years of age per 10 000	
15	2.2.2.3	Percentage of population above 40 years of age screened for hypertension and diabetes	
16	2.2.2.4	Adolescent birth rate (15-19 years old) per 1000	
17	2.2.3.1	Number of new and/ or revised national health policies, strategies and plans revised during UNDAF period	
18	2.2.3.2	Number of aimags and districts endorsed and implemented Sub-national Health System Strengthening Strategies	
19	2.2.4.1	Disease specific standardized mortality rate (disaggregated by urban/rural, gender, geographical area)	
20	2.2.4.2	Probability of dying between 15 and 60 years (disaggregated by gender)	
21	2.3.1	Primary and secondary education net enrollment rate of children from the poorest quintile	 & 
22	2.3.2	Enrollment of children with disabilities in general education schools	

	#	Indicators	Dashboards
23	2.3.3	Percentage of children under 5 years of age from the poorest quintile who are developmentally in track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being	
24	2.3.4	Percentage of children aged 36-39 months who are attending an early childhood education programme from the poorest quintile	
25	2.3.5	Learning achievement for 4th and 8th graders in mathematics and science	
26	2.4.1	Percentage of economically active population contributing to the social insurance system	
27	2.4.2	Public social protection expenditures as percentage of GDP	
28	2.5.1	Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years old	
29	2.5.2	Prevalence of overweight students aged 13-17 years old	
30	3.1.1	Proportion of implemented recommendations from UPR, CEDAW and other HR instruments relating to the protection/ promotion of human rights and basic freedoms for all	
31	3.1.2	Specific comprehensive policy measures and legislation are adopted and effectively implemented against discrimination of all kinds, especially women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTI and others	
32	3.1.3	Prevalence rate of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)	 (Baseline was determined in 2017)
33	3.2.1	Proportion of seats held by women in national and local parliament and government (SDG 5.5.1)	 (Except state secretaries and local governors)
34	3.3.1	Young people turnout in parliamentary elections	
35	3.3.2	Civil participation	

Dashboards:  target achieved/improving  stagnating  
 decreasing  information unavailable

In Outcome 1, the UN plausibly contributed to the legal environment for national development policy planning and budgeting and expansion of the protected area network in Mongolia.

For Outcome 2, the UN credibly contributed to the achievement of national targets on WASH, COVID-19 response in the health sector including vaccine, and sustaining the continuation of learning during the COVID-19, through an integrated approach to support tele-and e-learning, along with CP services for children and families.

In Outcome 3, improving the legal framework to protect and uphold human rights, including the right to freedom from violence (GBV/DV and violence against children), as well as in implementing and monitoring these laws, can be regarded as a key plausible contribution to UNDAF outcomes.

#### 4. Factors affecting implementation

**Finding:** Some of the main factors that contributed to progress towards UNDAF outcomes have been a clear long term development policy, and the legal environment. In terms of challenges, COVID-19, high turnover of government staff following the elections, and associated loss of institutional memory have been constraints in UNDAF implementation.

Among the factors that constrained the UNDAF implementation is the COVID-19 pandemic, which is frequently considered as a key factor limiting collaboration and cooperation because it delayed the capacity building activities, training workshops and monitoring of projects/programmes. The high turnover of government staff following the elections, and the associated loss of institutional memory also hampered collaboration and cooperation. There are limited government capacities in the new areas, such as SDG-budgeting and Integrated National Financing Framework.

On the other hand, the positive factors that facilitated the UNDAF implementation are a clear long term development policy (especially Vision 2030), the legal environment, the Green Development Policy, and Vision-2050 which set policy directions. In the case of food, agriculture, and light industry sectors, a partners' group has been established, which facilitated collaboration and cooperation not only with UN agencies, but also other development partners.

The full-fledged RCO, established as a result of the UN System reform, has contributed to the overall coherence and coordination among the UN agencies operating in Mongolia. As part of the reform, the UN agencies have been able to better implement joint projects and programmes, participate in joint SDG Fund's programmes, build strategic partnerships, and receive funding from the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

## **5. Geographical spread, integrated programming and geographical targeting**

**Finding: Working with a dispersed population can make it difficult to deliver certain programmes, and a cost-benefit analysis would probably show that the UN is spreading quite thin in the country. Logistical transport challenges make it difficult to reach some regions. The joint programme with WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF provides an interesting experience of an inter-agency integrated programming in the Umnogobi province, with a particular focus on marginalized, vulnerable populations and new emerging challenges coming from mining and migration.**

With respect to the *geographical spread* of UN interventions, the recent presentation made by the RCO includes an interesting map of Mongolia, which shows the multiple locations where the UN operates, and explains that in this current UNDAF, 16 UN agencies implemented 174 activities and projects in 21 locations in addition to the central UB area. Out of which, 140 activities have some impacts nationwide.<sup>14</sup>

Development partners noted that UN agencies are implementing relatively small and many projects, sometimes in the same areas. Other development partners and donors such as the World Bank have more strategic and larger scaled projects. Several government interviewees also mentioned that the UN support has overlapped in some aimags especially in the Western region, while there are few aimags such as Govisumber where the UN did not work in the current UNDAF. The government pushes the UN to work in all regions in a perspective of equity. Mongolia has always asked for that, and the UN is responsive to the host country.

Programming for development was more rural and is now shifting to more urban. Working with a dispersed population can make it difficult to deliver certain programmes, and a cost-benefit analysis would probably show that the UN is spreading quite thin in the country. Logistical transport challenges make it difficult to reach some regions. Even with regional hubs, it can take several days of driving to visit a project site. In this context, having a clear focus and a strategic clarity would be important for the next Cooperation Framework.

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<sup>14</sup> UNCT Delivery Status, 2017-2020 Progress, Altansuvd Tumursukh, RCO, August 2021, slides 2 and 15.

The 2019 Strategic Summary of Coordination Results report documented an interesting experience of an inter-agency *integrated programming*. The evaluation team observes that this could be an experience to assess in order to see if this could be a possible model to address the geographic spread of UN interventions through a more integrated approach aiming at creating models of interventions that can then be replicated and scaled up. Through a joint programme, WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF provided an integrated support to the Umnogobi province with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations, i.e., young mothers, female and child headed households, persons with disabilities and herders, among others and new emerging challenges coming from mining and migration. This integrated support aims at an increased coverage and improved quality of sexual and reproductive health services for women, adolescents and youth; reduced incidence of STIs and cervical cancer; increased detection and treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCD) including cervical cancer and trauma associated with road traffic injuries; strengthened capacity and improved sub-national level governance and strengthened GBV/DV prevention and response.

UNICEF has been using *Geographical Targeting Approaches* (GTAs). The UNICEF Mid-Term Review noted that the deepening of inequality and increased prevalence of population groups at “risk of being left behind” are important development challenges for the future. Recognising these disparities, in preparation for the current Country Programme, the Office produced Equity Profiles<sup>15</sup> which analysed provincial disparities, as well as factors linked to wealth and education levels. This guided geographical targeting and the selection of key areas of interventions and priority strategies targeting most at risk families and children in each technical programme area.

As further explained by the Evaluation of UNICEF Mongolia’s Geographic Targeting Approaches in Programming<sup>16</sup>, UNICEF provides support at the national, provincial and community level through their implementing partners including local government authorities to strengthen services and support for the most vulnerable children and their families. To ensure the support reaches the most vulnerable, UNICEF target their support to specific aimags and districts. Within programmes, such as education and health, they also try to target the most disadvantaged children and families. Together, these two approaches make up UNICEF’s Geographical Targeting Approach, which is generally seen to integrate a human-rights and equity-based approaches.

With that said, geographical and even thematic targeting were not always considered appropriate by GTA evaluation respondents within UNICEF and among national and local stakeholders.

Therefore, the UNDAF evaluation team considers these experiences and discussions on geographic spread of UN interventions, integrated programming, and geographical targeting, extremely interesting and suggests that they be considered during the preparation of the next Cooperation Framework, and during its future implementation.

## **6. Role of communication**

**Finding: Even though the UNDAF included an intention to Communicate as One through the United Nations’ Country Communications Group, most communications and advocacy work by UN Mongolia were limited to agency specific communications in a siloed approach. There was no strategic engagement of communications tools by the Outcome and Thematic Groups.**

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<sup>15</sup> Equity Profiles were produced for Health, HIV, Nutrition, Social inclusion, WASH, CP, Education, by UNICEF in November 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Evaluation of UNICEF Mongolia’s Geographic Targeting Approaches in Programming (Country Programmes 2012-2016 and 2017-2021), Cognos Research, UNICEF, 2021.

In the UNDAF document there was a very brief mention of the need to Communicate as One with the support of a United Nations Communications Group (UNCG), however, there were no effective links between this group and Outcome or Thematic Groups.

The UNCG, which TOR were elaborated in 2019, was not directly involved or consulted adequately in the UNDAF design and development stage. With the recruitment of the Communications and Advocacy Officer in the RCO in 2020, the UNCG was officially set up and elaborated a Joint UN Communications Strategy that laid the foundation for the communications and advocacy work, and for Communicating as One UN in the country. The UNCG developed the Annual Work Plan and common calendar to streamline communications as One UN only in 2021. The UNCG also stressed that limited financial and human resources are available for joint communications and communications by agencies, and for ad-hoc campaigns and communications initiatives.

To increase the role of communication, the UNCG should be included in the consultative processes for the Cooperation Framework. There is need to plan and allocate financial and human resources for joint communications within the CF and provide an empowering environment for UNCG to achieve collective and joint communications as One UN. For instance, the tasks related to collective and joint communications for the agencies' Communication Officers within the UNCG should be incorporated in their job descriptions and have proper incentives to enhance their motivation and commitment to joint UN communications.

## **C. Sustainability and orientation towards impact: Will the benefits last? What difference does the UNDAF make?**

### **1. Capacity development at national and local levels**

**EQ: To what extent has the UN system support extended in such a way to build national and local capacities and ensure long-term gains?**

**Finding: Despite efforts to build national and local capacities on the SDGs, budgeting, civil service reform, local governance, data collection, and analysis, the government capacity in RBM, M&E and evidence-based policy making is still weak in Mongolia.**

A lot of UN interventions under Outcome 1 built national and local capacities and ensured long-term gains for central and local governments, through capacity building activities such as training and workshops, in the area of SDGs, budgeting, civil service reform, and local governance.

The work undertaken under Outcome 3 on GBV strengthened the capacities in data collection, analysis, dissemination and utilization; in the multisectoral response system in the country; and in providing services to survivors of violence.

However, the UN may inadequately join forces to support the government capacity development in RBM, M&E and evidence-based policy making. The capacity to utilize the evidence in advocacy and policy making has not been sufficiently strengthened. The UN has not collectively assessed the gap in the effectiveness and adequacy of the capacity building investment, although the agencies extensively invested in their partners.

### **2. Sustainable changes that will last beyond UNCT's intervention -- scaling up and replication**

**EQ: Has the UNDAF's work brought about sustainable changes that will last beyond UNCT's intervention (for example, changes in the legal framework, policies, institutions, social and economic structure)? Has the UNCT's work been systemic, scaled up or replicated to ensure its effects are not limited in scope, but nation- or society-wide?**

**Finding:** There are concrete examples of collaborative projects launched under the UNDAF that have been maintained, replicated and scaled up by national partners. However, a lack of resources and of a scale-up or replication strategy hinder the potential to maintain some UNDAF benefits over time. For instance, successful demonstrations related to the delivery of social services to children ended due to the lack of budget for scale-up and replication. The government engagement is crucial for sustainability, and a financing mechanism could help to sustain UN interventions.

Under the Outcome 1, the UN has contributed to sustainable changes that will last beyond UNCT's intervention, for example by working on the legislative framework reforms such as the constitutional reform, the civil service reform, the Law on Administrative and Territorial Units and their Governance (LATUG), and Law on Development Policy, Planning and Management. In the area of emergency management, in 2017, the law on Disaster Prevention was approved with the UN support. 42 follow-up procedures were developed, and 10 guidelines and standards were released.

Sustainable changes may require community level behavioural or attitude changes, in addition to institutional capacity building at the national and/or sub-national level, since policies change frequently in the country. Therefore, it would be necessary to think of a financing mechanism or model that could be sustained after the UN interventions. In this regard, the UN is supporting the government in development of INFF, which provides a framework for financing national sustainable development priorities and the SDGs at the country level. The government engagement is crucial for the sustainability and alignment of the UNDAF with government priorities, from the onset of development of the UNDAF.

The coverage of social services meets the challenge of reaching last remaining portion which is the most challenging task under the Outcome 2. The successful demonstrations related to the delivery of social services to children ended due to the lack of budget for scale-up and replication. This limits nation- or society-wide effects of the interventions. Therefore, there is a need of a more systematic strategy for scale-up or replication. The weak enforcement of laws and policies, and the frequent change of government staff are also major bottlenecks to sustain the effects of the interventions.

Under Outcome 3, the UN GBV response and interventions have been institutionalized into Law, most notably the revised Law to Combat Domestic Violence (LCDV) and the related SOPs developed and approved to improve its implementation. Other laws have also been revised to include GBV prevention and response measures, such as the revised Crime Prevention Law and revised Family Law that include GBV data collection measures. This means that even at the end of UNDAF as well as UN's direct interventions, these measures will continue. A challenge to sustainability is the reversed trend on DV due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which requires multisectoral cooperation including not only usual partners but also new ones such as the private sector.

The government interviewees highlighted their efforts in upscaling or replication of the UN support to ensure its effects are not limited in scope, but nation- or society-wide. For instance, the local authorities have replicated the UNICEF child-friendly community initiative in 6 other aimags. According to the Law on Youth Development, there are now 36 centres with full-time staff, while only 16 youth development centres were established with the UN support. Local governments have established additional one-stop service centres and temporary protective shelters and allocated budgets in accordance with the law. In 2018, a training, research and information centre was established at the Authority for Family, Child and Youth Development (AFCYD) and now there is an institutionalized human resource capacity building mechanism for preparing staff who would work in the sector. Based on the results of the shock-

responsive programme of UNICEF, the decision was made to increase child cash transfer fivefold during the COVID time. In addition, UNICEF's pilot CHIPS (Cooking, Heating, Insulation, Products and Services) package (Mongolian ger heating and insulation products) have been instrumental in improving the insulation and ventilation of Mongolian gers. Therefore, the package was included in the "Green Loan" programme of the Government in order to make it possible to purchase the loan on soft terms.

It is worthy to note that government interviewees emphasized the need for a strong M&E and exit strategy to ensure the sustainability of the interventions. They also admitted that national ownership and commitment play a key role in sustainability and the high turnover of government staff hinders the sustainability of the interventions.

### **3. Orientation towards real impact on people**

**EQ: Was the UNDAF oriented towards having a real impact on people? What difference did the UNDAF make towards protecting the rights of people and their living environment?**

**Findings: The UNDAF was oriented towards having a real impact on people, and made a difference towards protecting the rights of people and their living environment. For instance, many public health measures supported by the UN have reached people on the ground. In some cases, however, it is too premature to assess impact. It can also be challenging to evaluate the national and local levels impact of the UNDAF through the evaluations of UN agencies' programmes and projects.**

According to UN staff, many UNDAF results had a real impact on people, for instance:

- The UN has collectively supported the Government in developing 15 laws to protect the rights of people and their living environment, although there is some fragmentation in the UNDAF implementation.
- The UN has tried to ensure that no one was left behind and it reached vulnerable groups especially during the COVID-19 crisis. The SERP has a strong focus on impact.
- Air pollution and climate change related interventions definitely had an impact on people.
- UNFPA established 11 OSSCs for survivors of GBV and supported (financial, technical, capacity building) 6 OSSCs and 2 shelters. OSSCs provide safe accommodations, as well as health, psychological, legal, counselling and protection services, and important referrals to other more specialized services that GBV survivors may need to escape and heal from violent situations. Cumulatively, OSSCs and shelters served 12,493 clients, and 3,134 cases were handled by Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDTs) from 2018 to 2020.

The government interviewees confirmed the impact reached. Many public health measures supported by the UN have reached people on the ground. For instance, children and pregnant and lactating women were provided multi-ingredient micronutrients. UNICEF, FAO and UNFPA have supported the establishment of freshwater wells, prepared and trained local volunteer firefighters, and built emergency management capacity by providing machinery and equipment. UNDP BIOFIN project has strengthened the local environment sector financing mechanism to protect the rights of people and their living environment. In the area of CP, the 24-hour hotline has been in operation to receive emergency calls from children since 2014. UNICEF has supported the capacity building to prepare supervisors, and case managers, and provided a software. As a result, received calls increased indicating that the public awareness on child violence increased.

In order to triangulate this information, the evaluation team looked in detail at 17 evaluations conducted by UN agencies, out of a total of 33 evaluations or studies provided to the consultants by the agencies. **See Annex 4: List of References and Background Documents.**

Most evaluations do not deal (at all or in detail) with the impact criteria, most likely because it was not required in the TOR, and would be costly in terms of time and resources. Nevertheless, the evaluators present below some interesting observations on impact that were made in some of these UN agencies' evaluations.

#### Box 1. Some observations on impact in UN agencies' evaluations

The evaluation team recognizes a positive contribution to the project objectives, but it would take some years to see the viable changes if project outputs were continued after project completion. (FAO Terminal evaluation of the project "Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation, sustainable forest management and carbon sink enhancement into Mongolia's productive forest landscapes").

In terms of impact (higher-level outcomes), the Terminal Evaluation Team thinks that the UNDP implemented NAMA Project, although a medium-sized GEF project, has managed to contribute to laying a basis for market transformation for energy efficiency in the construction sector by: (i) Preparing the ground for demonstration of technologies and approaches in a number of pilot buildings; (ii) Informing policy-making by providing assessment (GHG inventory) and standards methodologies, which are now available for use by the relevant government agencies (e.g., MCUD, CDC, Energy, and UB Municipality) and some programmes implemented with the support of other development partners; and (iii) Facilitating behavioural change through knowledge enhancement and information dissemination. (GEF Terminal Evaluation Report - Ministry of Construction and Urban Development (MCUD), Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions in the Construction Sector).

Innovative interventions for working with men to change their behaviours have been initiated. There is a new law, new operational procedures, new mechanisms and structures, new learning and understanding. All these new elements have begun to be applied and results are gradually emerging. The question to be asked now is how are these new elements being used by different stakeholders to improve response and service provision. How is the new knowledge being generated impacting the general public, in terms of changing their understanding, changing social norms and ultimately changing behaviours. Many of the results of the project will emerge during its course and many will continue to emerge in the years to come. Evidence of such impact will need to be documented now and later, to give feedback to the GoM which will further help in strengthening their capacities. (UNFPA Mid-Term Review Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Mongolia).

Good progress has been achieved in provinces, and the strategic approach articulating on the ground support to pilots and models with policy impact has led to expansion of some initiatives, such as the Child Friendly Communities, now active in 11 out of 21 provinces. It is hoped that further advocacy will lead to the adoption of this strategy nationwide. (Mid-Term Review of the Country Programme 2017-2021, UNICEF Mongolia).

The project's impact was good (rated at 3 on the 5-point scale assessment). It is too premature to assess the extent to which migrants particularly those impacted by climate change and/or natural disasters benefited from this project in terms of their improved livelihoods and preparedness. The project contributed to changes in the government system to some extents regarding the internal migration management. However, effects to be observed among migrants and prospective migrants on their livelihoods and preparedness to climate change and/or natural disasters could not be seen yet at least for a short-term until the government develops and implements policies aiming at addressing the climate change and/or natural disaster induced migration with referencing to the DTM data. (IOM Ex-post Evaluation on Climate Change and Disaster related Migration in Mongolia).

These evaluations attest that the UNDAF had an impact in many ways and in numerous programmes of UN agencies. In some cases, however, it is too premature to assess impact. It can also be challenging to evaluate the national and local levels impact of the UNDAF through the evaluations of UN agencies' programmes and projects.

## **D. Coherence and coordination: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?**

### **1. The UNDAF as an effective and strategic tool for the UN system in Mongolia**

EQ: To what extent has the UNDAF served as an effective and strategic tool for the collective interventions of the UN system? To what extent has the UNDAF strengthened the coherence of support by UNCT members towards the common objectives and to deliver quality, integrated, SDG-focused policy support?

EQ: How well are the UN agencies working together towards the expected results? To what extent were internal synergies between agencies sought/materialized? What was the UNDAF value added and/or missed opportunities, as a coordination mechanism?

**Finding:** The UNDAF has not really served as an effective and strategic tool for the collective interventions of the UN system. Internal synergies are missing, except in a few joint programmes, however, these are generally not derived from the UNDAF, and are rather resource-driven, taking advantage of funding opportunities. The UNDAF has not been very useful, however, at least it gave the broad directions for all UN agencies, and provided the big picture on which agencies tried to align, and a rationale for joint interventions and programming.

Based on its discussion with the RCO, UN agencies, and development partners, the evaluation team considers that the agencies and the RCO could have worked together in a more coordinated way. Instead, agencies tended to implement their agency projects in a siloed manner, except in the case of joint programmes but these are often driven by resources, taking advantage of funding opportunities. Therefore, there is a gap in terms of what is needed to enhance internal coherence.

The evaluation team observed that the agencies are not looking at the bigger picture, and tend to focus on their mandates and priorities. Though the RCO does not have oversight responsibility over their programmatic areas of the agencies, it may consider how to strengthen its coordination role for achieving better UNDAF results.

The UNDAF has not served as an effective and strategic tool for the collective interventions of the UN system to a full extent. Currently there is a highly mechanical integration of what the UN agencies do into the UN-INFO system. Therefore, the UNDAF cannot be seen as a coherent support by UNCT members towards common objectives. Internal synergies are missing, except in a few joint programmes, however, these are generally not derived from the UNDAF.

The UNDAF has not been very useful for the UNCT in Mongolia and its Government counterparts. It has not been much used. A strong accountability framework is missing. The Outcome Groups met generally once a year when it was time to report on results. It should be noted, as indicated in the 2019 Strategic Summary of Coordination Results report, that a greater coordination and sharing of work are considered essential for achieving the outcomes. There are limited avenues and platforms for collaboration and communication. More joint initiatives should be fostered, and cross-agency thematic groups revived. New opportunities for synergistic initiatives were expected with the new Common Country Analysis (CCA), this evaluation of the UNDAF, and the planning for the new Cooperation Framework.

The joint programmes show an effort from the UNCT to implement the UNDAF and to enhance internal coherence. However, even for joint programmes, the different activities are often being implemented by the different agencies separately. **See Annex 9: List of joint UN programmes and projects.**

However, the UNDAF at least sets the broad directions for all UN agencies. The UNDAF provides a big picture on which agencies try to align, and a rationale for joint interventions and programming. The UNDAF helps the agencies to know what they are doing in their respective UNDAF outputs and outcomes, and occasionally where they can join their forces, and come up with joint programming or programmes. But more synergies and coherence are needed. Inter-agency thematic coordination groups, such as the GTG, CG, and GBV-SC act as a venue for agencies to share what they are doing, and to find areas for cooperation. However, the Outcome Groups' experience shows that most joint activities happen bilaterally between individual agencies, according to their respective mandates. Agencies with complementary mandates, such as UNFPA's GBV focus and UNICEF's CP focus, are able to collaborate closely at the project level (sharing funds, technical expertise), but these discussions more often happen bilaterally at the head of office or technical staff levels. For instance, UNFPA and UNICEF collaborated closely to achieve shared goals Gender-Based Violence/Child Protection (GBV/CP), mostly by outsourcing some work under their respective projects to each other, as well as sharing technical expertise as needed.

The GTG is the coordination and information sharing mechanism among the UN Agencies, for the organization of the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV campaign, which is considered as a success story of UN Agency coordination and coherence. Also, trainings, studies and policy advocacy are the areas for greater coordination and partnership.

A few years after the delinking process was approved by the General Assembly, there is a need to improve the understanding of the roles between the RC (coordination, high level advocacy), and UNDP (working on the technical, substantive side, playing an integrator role). Efforts need to be joined up and complementary. When the system was set up, the RC Office had only a RC supported by a RC Officer. With the delinking, the RCO is now (since the third semester of 2021) more staffed and better equipped to support the UNCT in implementing UNDAF in a coordinated and synergistic manner. Of course, the RCO is not supposed to implement the UNDAF – it is the UNCT's responsibility – but the RCO can now better support the agencies and ensure coordination.

The MAF further recommends that "All UNCT members actively engage in all stages of the UN Cooperation Framework cycle, including through UN results groups, and joint workplans, and activity in support to the government to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda". This includes Non-Resident Agencies (NRAs). Nonetheless, the NRAs which are part of the Mongolian Country Team are located in different countries (IAEA in Vienna, UNEP and ESCAP in Bangkok, UNIDO and UNESCO in Beijing). Other agencies like UN-Habitat and ILO do not have full representation in the Country.

## **2. Management structure and decision-making processes (Steering Committee, Outcome Groups, other groups)**

**EQ: What are the challenges and opportunities of the current management structure and decision-making processes (Steering Committee, Outcome Groups, other groups)? How efficient is the current monitoring mechanism?**

**Finding:** The UNDAF National Steering Committee, which is responsible for making decisions at strategic level and give overall policy guidance to support Mongolia in achieving sustainable development, met once a year, starting in June 2018. However, the SC has not been involved in many substantive discussions, and there are opportunities in this direction. Organizing instead more regular meetings of the UNSDCF Steering Committee (twice or thrice a year), and dealing with more substantive issues, could ensure a more meaningful participation and increased ownership of high-level Government officials, in the Cooperation Framework implementation and strategic management. The Outcome Groups and the Thematic Groups met infrequently in this UNDAF cycle. There has been a limited role and involvement of both Resident Coordinators involved in this UNDAF

**cycle, and of the UNCT, in the coordination of Outcome Groups. The evaluation team considers that Outcome Groups could be co-chaired by UN agencies and the Government.**

The UNDAF National Steering Committee's composition was agreed at its first meeting in June 2018. Thus, it did not meet at the beginning of the UNDAF in 2017, and not until June 2018, one year and a half after the UNDAF started to be implemented. The SC met once a year, as attested by the minutes of the meetings. It is co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and UN RC. Members are at vice-ministers' level, however, the decision to meet is at the discretion of the Co-Chairs, i.e. the RC and the MFA. SC members include the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Environment & Tourism, the Ministry of Labour & Social Protection, as well as the National Human Rights Commission, the National Committee on Gender Equality, the National Development Agency, and the National Statistics Office. UN agencies' representatives to the SC are UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF.

The SC is responsible for making decisions at strategic level and give overall policy guidance to support Mongolia in achieving the sustainable development and the SDGs. Outreach to other stakeholders is broaden to Outcome Results Groups, through possible technical consultations and regular meeting during the year. Other line ministries as well as representatives of the private sector, CSOs and development partners can be invited to the SC meetings as observers depending on the agenda items.

However, reading the minutes as key evidence, and interviewing various actors showed the evaluation team that the SC has not been much involved in many substantive discussions on development issues, and there are opportunities in this direction. Organizing more regular meetings of the Steering Committee (twice or thrice a year), and dealing with more substantive issues, could ensure a more meaningful participation and increased ownership of high-level Government officials, in the future Cooperation Framework implementation and strategic management.

The Outcome Groups are the main bodies for supporting the implementation of the UNDAF, and monitoring and reporting on UNDAF progress, and the Thematic Groups and Working Groups support the UNCT in the implementation of the UNDAF, however, most of them did not meet very often, and some of them were formed recently. There has been a limited role and involvement of both RCOs involved in this UNDAF cycle, and of the UNCT, in the coordination of Outcome Groups. The Outcome Groups met once a year, mainly for reporting purposes. The Outcome Groups are the following: Outcome Group 1: Promoting inclusive growth and sustainable management of natural resources (chaired by UNDP); Outcome Group 2: Enhancing social protection and utilization of quality and equitable social services (chaired by UNICEF); and Outcome Group 3: Fostering voice and strengthening accountability (chaired by UNFPA).

Most of the Thematic Groups and Working Groups, which support the UNCT in the implementation of the UNDAF, did not meet very often, and some of them were created recently. The Thematic Groups are: (i) the Gender Group; (ii) the Human Rights Group; (iii) the Youth Group. The Working Groups are: (iv) the Operations Management Team; (v) the Communications Group; and (vi) the M&E Group. The evaluation team also understood that two other groups (SDGs and HIV/AIDS), which were occasionally mentioned in some documents, like the 2018 Strategic Summary of Coordination Results report, irregularly met during the period 2017-2021.

The evaluation team is aware of the fact that recently issued guidance suggests that results groups should be co-chaired by one or two UNCT members, and where appropriate by a high-level Government official, as explained in the box below.

## Box 2. UNCT working arrangements according to the Management and Accountability Framework

According to the recently issued Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) of the UN Development and RC System,<sup>17</sup> "each UNCT, under the leadership of the RC, will agree on the specific parameters of UNCT working arrangements, including the establishment and oversight of coordination mechanisms that report to the UNCT, such as UN Cooperation Framework Results Groups, Operational Management Team, Gender thematic group and Communications Group, or other such mechanisms as required. Ideally, UN Cooperation Framework results groups are co-chaired by one or two UNCT members and where appropriate by a high-level Government official, with periodic reporting to the RC/UNCT on progress. They should involve diverse civil society actors throughout the Cooperation Framework programming cycle, with a specific focus on those at risk of being left behind."

While the MAF suggests that results groups should be co-chaired by one or two UNCT members and where appropriate by a high-level Government official, several UN agencies and the three Outcome Groups members interviewed during the evaluation have suggested that Outcome Groups could be co-chaired by the RCO and UN agencies. Indeed, in Mongolia, the UNCT is small, and only six agencies are doing most of the UNDAF related work (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, WHO, IOM). Moreover, only three agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA) chaired an Outcome Group for the 5, and now 6-year duration of the UNDAF (with the UNDAF extension up to 2022), and no rotation occurred.

According to the Outcome Groups interviewed by the evaluation team, with only these few agencies having the capacity to co-chair, there would be room for the RCO to play a more active role in the Outcome Groups, for instance by co-chairing them, with different staff. This would most likely lead to more integration between an empowered RCO and UN agencies. Hence, the evaluation team considers that this idea could be analysed further by the RC/RCO, the UNCT and the Outcome Groups.

The rotation in the agencies chairing the Outcome Groups could also help to make them more dynamic and offer the agencies a sense of a mission and achievement, after a period of two years for instance. Chairing an OG could most likely be done only by agencies on the ground with enough staff and capacity.

Finally, the current management structure and decision-making processes (Steering Committee, Outcome Groups, Thematic Groups) seems to be working mainly for reporting. However, they all should have more substantive discussions involving government counterparts to review the results and analyse the successes and challenges. The role of the RC, the UNCT, and the Groups' Chairs is quite crucial in this sense. In addition, the M&E group should also support the Outcome Groups with the implementation of the next UNSDCF. The M&E Group should be overseeing the UNDAF implementation against the Results Framework.

### 3. Joint Work Plans, monitoring and reporting

**Finding:** While the UNDAF document had foreseen to be made operational through the development of Joint Work Plans (JWPs) and/or agency-specific work plans and project documents, the Outcome Groups and the UNCT did not develop JWPs in the format recommended by DCO in the UNDAF Guidelines, that they would have used to monitor the UNDAF implementation. JWPs have not been considered indispensable to implement the UNDAF. Instead, all projects implemented by UN agencies have been listed in the UN-INFO platform. As a result, it has been difficult to show common results. Reporting results on the UN-INFO system is not a synergetic effort, but rather a sort of mechanical and additional task besides the agency specific reporting requirements. However, the UNCT, with the support of the Outcome Groups and RCO, analyzed and monitored all the UN interventions in Mongolia using the UNINFO since the UNDAF start, which contributed to very well-

<sup>17</sup> Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System, Consolidated Version, UN Sustainable Development Group, 15 September 2021, page 8.

**documented UNDAF annual cumulative progress reports, which have been extremely useful for the evaluation team, for the analysis of key results achieved.**

The UNDAF document had foreseen (page 38) to be made operational through the development of JWPs and/or agency-specific work plans and project documents.

The JWPs should form an agreement between the UN agencies and implementing partners on the use of resources. They identify the exact deliverables, responsible parties, as well as the exact costs, the available resources, and the funding gap. The design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of JWPs are supposed to be coordinated by the Outcome Results Groups, chaired by a UN agency representative on behalf of the UNCT in Mongolia and co-chaired by a relevant government representative.

However, while they were planned as an option in the UNDAF document, the JWPs were not developed during UNDAF implementation in the format recommended by DCO in the UNDAF Guidelines. Instead, since 2017 when the UN-Mongolia started using the UN-INFO platform, all projects implemented by the agencies have been put in UN-INFO. Thus, the Outcome Groups and the UNCT did not monitor the UNDAF implementation through JWPs.

The evaluation team recognizes that the format of JWPs recommended by the UNDAF guidelines is too detailed and not user-friendly to meet this strategic objective at the UNCT level. It is more useful at the technical level. Designing a simple M&E Framework that could have helped the UNCT to strategically monitor progress of outputs and outcomes, with only essential information, could have been an alternative for the monitoring of UNDAF results, but the UNCT did not use it either. These kinds of M&E Frameworks were required and frequently used by a previous generation of UNDAFs.

However, the UNCT, with the support of the Outcome Groups and the RCO, prepared very well-documented progress reports, which, in addition, present results in a cumulative way. These reports have been very useful for the evaluation team, for the analysis of key results achieved. These reports have been prepared in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020.

According to UN interviewees, reporting has, however, been a challenging task, with a lot of information sent by the agencies that needed to be summarized to avoid a long report. Furthermore, it has been difficult to show common results. Reporting results on the UN-INFO system is not a synergetic effort but rather a sort of additional task besides the agency specific reporting requirements. Indeed, the agency specific reporting is not well coordinated and harmonized with the UNDAF reporting requirement. UN-INFO helps agencies and the RCO to see at least who is doing what, and the respective expenditures. However, UN-INFO tends to be a mechanical compilation of all UN interventions, and according to some interviewees, was not originally designed to ensure synergies and coherence. The current monitoring mechanism has not been efficient enough in improving planning interventions based on the lessons learned, as the data and information are used mostly for reporting purposes.

This UNDAF reporting has been complemented by UNCT Strategic Summaries of Coordination Results, prepared by the UNCT with the RCO support, every year. In 2020, however, the latest UNSDG/DCO format of such report was dramatically changed, and it has been named "IMS 2020 Annual Survey: Programmatic and Coordination Areas", and it is generated by UN-Info. The Evaluation Team would like to stress that this latest format gives some interesting short replies (often Yes or No) to indicate how coordination was implemented in the country, but it is much less analytical than before, even if the UNDAF Progress Reports are supposed to fill the gap. The format has also huge space lost on the left column, when you print the document, and the interesting column has very small characters, making it hard to read comfortably. The design of this report could therefore be improved by DCO, and its contents should be as analytical as possible.

#### 4. Coordination of UN's intervention with its partners

**EQ: How has the UNDAF facilitated the coherence of UN's intervention with its partners, such as the Government, CSOs, Academia, development partners, private sector, etc.? How effective has the involvement of the UN system been in strengthening the partnership between government and civil society?**

**Finding:** The UN has contributed to the coordination among the Government organizations by promoting the SDGs as the heart of long-term development policy of Mongolia. However, an enhanced cooperation would be needed with the Government, which should have a stronger ownership of the UNDAF implementation. The UNCT has a close relationship with development partners, and meetings stimulate possibilities of cooperation with UN Agencies. However, there are opportunities for improvements in the coordination and cooperation between the UN and development partners. There is need to address sensitive issues, through structured discussions. The UNCT and the RC are currently in the process of improving the coordination and cooperation between the UN and development partners through the establishment of ToR of the Development Partners Group and sub/thematic groups. There are also opportunities of collaboration with CSOs, the Academia and the private sector in the implementation of the UNDAF.

The Outcome Groups do not have government counterparts, however, the UNDAF is supposed to be the Government-UN document, and a stronger cooperation would be needed with the Government, which should have a stronger ownership of the UNDAF implementation. The high and frequent turnover in government structures and human resources, even at the technical level, makes it difficult to facilitate the coherence of UN's intervention with partners.

The National Development Agency, a government regulatory agency, is the secretariat of the National Council of Sustainable Development, chaired by the Prime Minister. This Council convened twice in 2021. It convened in May to review the nationalized SDG targets and indicators. It also convened in November at the request of the RC to endorse the new UNSDCF Vision and Outcomes, which the Prime Minister did endorse at the meeting.

Mongolia has a small Development Partners Group, which is co-chaired by the RC. The fact that the development community is small in the country, in comparison to other countries, helps in coordinating activities between the UN and development partners. Collaboration and cooperation are facilitated by the monthly meetings, which stimulate possibilities of cooperation with UN Agencies. Most Development Partners stressed that they have good or excellent collaborations with many agencies, in all the UNDAF areas. They recognize their expertise and long-standing relationships with the Government institutions. See also the Comparative Advantage section of this report. They also value excellent collaborations with several agencies, including WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA on COVID-19 response activities. They noted, however, that for some projects, most activities have been postponed or carried out virtually due to COVID-19 circumstances. If COVID-19 persists, it will be important to adjust the plan elaborately ahead of the implementation.

The ADB and other partners are very appreciative of the UN chairing the Health Cluster to oversee COVID response with the Deputy Prime Minister. The ADB Cooperation with WHO (COVID), UNICEF, UNFPA (coordination on DV) and UNDP (joint MAPS process funded by ADB and UNDP, subsequently with the EU). ADB also established a small SDG Innovation Fund with UNDP.

While the UN plays an important convening and coordination role, it would benefit from further enhancing in the coordination and cooperation with development partners. The UN RC, with the support of the RCO, is currently addressing challenges about the approval of decisions and the sharing of

information (how, who, when?). The UNCT and the RC are currently in the process of improving the coordination and cooperation between the UN and development partners through the establishment of ToR of the Development Partners Group. In addition, under the leadership of the RC, the RCO is coordinating and helping to establish sub/thematic groups for the Development Partners Groups to enhance coordination and effectiveness of specific thematic areas.

However, there is need to address sensitive issues, through structured discussions, based on general good practices on development partners coordination, discussions which could be inspired by those between FAO, ADB and the EU on sustainable agriculture and climate change. These issues include gender-based violence and sexual violence against children, discrimination against LGBTIs, ethnic minorities, etc. Each relevant agency could also take the lead each of a thematic group, helping to build consensus with partners, and leveraging resources.

With respect to the CSOs, they can complement well both the UN and development partners. International and national NGOs tend to work faster and in a more flexible way, while the UN has backbone programmes with international expertise and technical assistance. There can be good complementarity, building on each other's strengths and weaknesses. There are, however, governance, policy and communication issues, as well as mechanisms that are needed to ensure proper collaboration, with UN agencies and development partners. The March 2021 Steering Committee acknowledged the limited cooperation of the UN with NGOs by indicating that "3% of the delivery was made in cooperation with national NGOs", in the UNDAF results from 2017 to 2020, according to information provided by UN agencies in UN-Info.

The CSO interviewees highlighted that the UNDAF cooperation with NGOs is limited, and NGOs act as mere implementors of short-term projects, and as information providers. There is a need to ensure the active and in-depth, genuine contribution of CSOs, private sector and academia in the design and implementation of the UNDAF. Some CSOs find some UN agencies are not transparent enough, bureaucratic, and difficult to cooperate with. Trainings and activities conducted are found out by CSOs only from the media. UN agencies should improve their communication, and the information exchange and sharing with CSOs. UN's support to CSOs and academia is very much limited to projects.

## **5. Comparative advantages of the UN**

**EQ: What will be the comparative advantages of the UN in the country, for the next programme cycle?**

**Finding: In terms of comparative advantage, the UN is a guarantor of international norms and standards, playing a role of an international broker. The UN enjoys a strong credibility and is acknowledged to have strong technical expertise.**

Development partners appreciate the reputation that UN agencies have in their specific areas of expertise. Each UN agency in Mongolia has its own expertise with highly professional staff. The UN has a unique ability to gather technical knowledge from everywhere in the world. The Government confirmed the finding. They highlighted technical expertise in social and environmental areas including climate change and strong evidence-based interventions of the UN.

This raises the issue, however, of the exact added value of an agency, for development partners. A lot of work is outsourced by UN agencies to Mongolian implementing partners. Real comparative advantages of the UN are sometime unclear, while there are high transaction costs to deal with the UN. Therefore, the value for money is not always clear.

For some development partners, UN agencies have a strong credibility. For instance, they stress that WHO has been very reliable and important in the last 18 months. UNICEF has a strong mandate, and air pollution which has a great impact on children, is an astute positioning for this organization. The Government interviewees mentioned that the UN has proven experience working with groups that are left behind compared to any other development partners.

Also useful is the role of the UN as a convener, with authority supported by funding: UN agencies can help to identify areas where other development partners can complement or supplement the activities, and where gaps can be filled. It also helps connecting the dots between different Government institutions.

UN agencies are key partners for the Mongolian Government and other partners for supporting the achievement of the SDGs, including through coordination. The UN provided support to the Government in drafting the 2019 SDG Implementation Report (Voluntary National Review) and supported the process of aimags and districts' medium-term development, in the framework of the SDGs. It also convened, High-level SDG Summit, Food Systems Dialogues, with the National Committee on Sustainable Development and RC's support.

The UN is also a guarantor of international norms and standards, which advocates with the government to enhance their protection, fulfilment and communication. The UN is playing a role of an international broker, which helps voice different stakeholders' opinions and convey them to decision-makers. In addition, the UN is a major source of international best practices, norms and standards and knowledge, especially in the areas of human rights and equal participation.

## E. Efficiency: How well are resources being used?

### 1. Role of operations and transaction costs

**EQ: Has the UNDAF reduced transaction costs for partners through greater UN coherence and discipline?**

**Finding:** The Operational Management Team advanced common business operations to ensure greater economy of scale and reducing operations costs through common business processes in procurement. The Harmonized Cash Transfers (HACT) has allowed to reduce transaction costs, through a common operational framework for transferring cash to government and non-governmental partners. Transaction costs may decrease with the common back-office initiative, which is part the UN reform efficiency agenda.

To witness efficiency gains, there is need for joint planning, joint implementation and joint monitoring and reporting. In most cases, the agencies are independently implementing their own programmes and projects. The operations and services to existing joint programmes are still very segregated with agencies. There is need to enhance the coherence of joint programming such as unified PIUs and delivery mechanism to reduce transaction costs. Also, UN agencies sometimes sub-contract other UN agencies (SDG-budgeting project funded by EU) which inflate the transaction costs.

The UNCT has prepared and completed the development of Business Operations Strategy in the end of 2020 only whereas the UNDAF implementation started in 2017. As reported in the 2018 Strategic Summary of Coordination Results report, the UNCT is committed to advancing common business operations to ensure greater economy of scale and reducing operations costs. An Operational Management Team (OMT) worked to carry out joint activities within its Annual Work Plans, concentrating on a collaborative approach and increasing effectiveness of UN operations. With the aim to streamline and harmonize common business processes in procurement, the OMT established a common Procurement Task Force, and 14 commonly funded procurements were conducted in 2018 alone, including the development of common LTAs (Long-Term Agreements), greening and waste management activities, as well as premises improvement works. These initiatives helped reduce administrative costs through better use of staff time and efforts, as well as enabled some agencies to carry out procurements despite their insufficient capacity.

There are three common services for the UN: travel, printing and ICT to ensure effective and efficient services for all participating UN agencies. The benefits of common services include enhanced transparency and accountability of delivery of results, monitoring expenditures and tracking contributions to the outcomes and reporting. The UN common premises and operations, carpool and LTAs) have contributed to some costs savings. The UN Mongolia is in common premises for more than 15 years. Almost all agencies, active in Mongolia, except WHO, reside in the common premises. The UN House is provided to the UN for its official use by the GoM rent-free. Moreover, WHO is hosted by the Ministry of Health.

The Harmonized Cash Transfers (HACT) has been adapted by the UN agencies to reduce transaction costs. According to the 2018 Strategic Summary of Coordination Results report, the UNSDG HACT framework is a common operational (harmonized) framework for transferring cash to government and non-governmental Partners (both IPs and RPs). It was applied in UN operations, leveraging the experience and knowledge of the participating agencies: UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. Understanding of the country's public finance management and related risks was achieved through the HACT macro assessment, commissioned by the UN working group on HACT.

In 2021, as a part the UN reform efficiency agenda, Mongolia is one of the second group (phase) countries to roll out common back-office initiative. The analysis will define areas for further improvements. When the common back office is introduced and more operational support is provided on that, transaction costs may reduce. Joint activities based on the same approach should be encouraged to reduce transaction costs.

As most government organizations work with different UN agencies, they did not observe the reduction in transaction costs due to greater UN coherence. However, the government interviewees tend to agree that the UN interventions are well coordinated in substantive work and operational coordination, not only among the UN agencies, but also among development partners to avoid duplications. Some government interviewees emphasized that it is early to assess the efficiency of the UN system reform as it is quite new in Mongolia. The UN initiated projects and programmes that effectively lay the foundations for numerous activities to be completed by the Government contributed to the reduction of transaction costs from the Government end. However, some government interviewee said that it is important to consult with Government agencies when working with local authorities (e.g., temporary protection shelters and one-stop service centers). Others noted some duplication of the UN assistance with other partners (e.g., water facilities for livestock).

## **2. Integrated funding framework and resource mobilization**

**EQ: To what extent has the UNDAF been supported by an integrated funding framework and by adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda? What were the funding status and gaps? Have pooled funding instruments (i.e., SDG Acceleration Fund, Global SDG Fund) helped respond to UNDAF priorities?**

**Finding:** The UNDAF is not supported by an integrated funding framework. There are no adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda. The UNDAF is supposed to be a resource mobilization tool for the Government and the UN. However, there was limited success in this direction, and that should improve in the next CF. In addition to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other Thematic Funds, potential areas for additional resource mobilization include South-south cooperation, Public Private Partnerships, and government investment funds. In addition, the government financial contribution will also be needed for the next CF.

The UNDAF is not supported by an integrated funding framework. Since there was no JWP, there was less need for an integrated funding framework. UN-INFO allows the UN to see how much is available, the funding needs and gaps, but in a fragmented way i.e. from the agencies perspectives. There are no adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda. However, there was limited success in this direction, and that should improve in the next CF. South-south cooperation, Public Private Partnerships, strategic engagement with IFIs and pooled funding for the SDGs, and government investment funds, can all be potential areas for additional resource mobilization. The government financial contribution will also be needed for the next CF. The potential of private sector funding is likely to remain small and unpredictable, and would only fund activities that can be marketed.

The UN is getting increasing funding from multiple funds such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, GCF etc. This can be a good source for generating more resources. Two of the four UN joint programmes are funded by the SDG Trust Fund. With the funding from the UN Joint SDG Fund, the UN supported the process for the development of Mongolia's Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). Two other programmes on COVID are funded by the UN COVID-19 Recovery and Response Fund. MPTF projects

with several UN agencies facilitate collaboration, exchange of expertise, and broader and more comprehensive interventions to address development problems. In the future, more joint programmes will be initiated using these funds. The RC has been advocating with local donors to leverage local resources to UN interventions, through pooled funding instruments. The SERP also identified some gaps in resource mobilization in UN response over 12-18 months.

Some development partners recognize that an increased predictability of funding for UN agencies would help make the UN more strategic. It would be useful if development partners could fund a strategy rather than specific development programmes. For the next Cooperation Framework, the UN would need to define what it wants to do, and prepare a longer-term strategy on how to mobilize resources and work with different partners.

## **F. Crosscutting principles: Have the UNDAF left no one behind?**

The UN in Mongolia incorporated five key programming principles in the UNDAF. These principles are universal, emphasize accountability, and are relevant to the cooperation between the UN, the Government, CSOs, and other development partners. There are three normative principles: human rights and HRBA, gender equality and environmental sustainability; along with two enabling principles: capacity development and RBM.

According to the UNDAF document, all five principles provide a lens, both individually and in combination, for strengthened UN engagement with and support to national development planning processes. While this UNDAF included specific results on human rights, gender equality and environmental protection under the relevant outcomes, these three normative principles were also expected to be mainstreamed across and within the UNDAF outcomes and corresponding results.

Currently, the cross-cutting areas such as gender and human rights are more represented in the Outcome Group 3 than in Groups 1 and 2. There is a tagging in the UNINFO. Based on the gender/human rights markers, it is possible to identify how the UN interventions are contributing towards the cross-cutting areas.

### **1. Mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment**

**EQ: Has the UNDAF properly mainstreamed gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE)? Were outcomes, outputs and indicators gender-sensitive? Were gender-disaggregated targets set and achieved by the UNDAF? How was GEWE integrated into UNDAF implementation, monitoring and reporting?**

**Finding: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) has been taken into account in the UNDAF design and implementation of all outcomes, especially Outcome 3. According to the UN-INFO gender equality marker, 94 percent of the UNDAF interventions have addressed the promotion of gender equality in Mongolia in the period 2017-2020. Nonetheless, there have been no organic links and active engagement between Outcome Groups and the Gender Theme Group. The latter played and can play an important role to encourage discussions on emerging issues, related to gender. With that said, with worrisome trends on gender inequalities and gender-based violence due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are opportunities for an increased attention to GEWE. There is also a need to focus on men when the gender gap is discussed, e.g., the significant gap in male and female life expectancies, and the role men can play in GEWE.**

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) has been taken into account in the UNDAF design and implementation in all outcomes. The UN agencies have also been encouraged by their Headquarters to work on gender issues and report on results. In the UNDAF Outcome 3, two indicators deal specifically with gender, one on gender-based violence (*3.1.3 Prevalence rate of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*), and the other devoted to increased representation of women (*3.2.1 Proportion of seats held by women in national and local parliament and government (SDG 5.5.1)*).

According to the latest Steering Committee minutes (March 2021), 94 percent of the UNDAF interventions have addressed the promotion of gender equality in Mongolia in the period 2017-2020. This information comes from UN-INFO, where all UN agencies inserted their projects and programmes and selected gender equality and human rights markers, according to a predetermined scale.<sup>18</sup> The details of the Gender and Human Rights markers by each scale (0-3), provides a reflection on the degree that gender equality has been integrated in the planning and execution of the UNDAF. The presentation made on the UNDAF results report provides the detailed results of the Gender and Human Rights markers by each scale.<sup>19</sup>

With that said, aside from indicators under the UNDAF outputs that specifically target gender inequality and GBV issues, UNDAF indicators do not specifically measure the impact of interventions for women and girls, and UNDAF reporting of results is not necessarily gender disaggregated. Similarly, the Outcome Groups reported that although there is gender-disaggregated data, gender analysis is often missing to support the Government in building capacity for gender sensitive analysis.

The Outcome Groups reported no direct or active engagement with the Gender Thematic Group (GTG), and discussions that took place within the GTG were not organically brought to the Outcome Groups. While the GTG does not coordinate with the Outcome Groups specifically and explicitly on UNDAF issues, there is significant overlap of focal points for GTG and UNDAF Outcome 3. The GTG provides updates during UNCT meetings. Besides making aware the Heads of Agencies of what is planned, this helps ensure coordination among UN agencies and Results Groups, since three Heads of Agencies also lead the Results Group. The GTG usually serves as a venue to discuss emerging issues in Mongolia related to gender (e.g., GBV, quotas on female representatives in parliament, etc.), and to come up with a joint UN response to these issues that capitalize on the different comparative advantages of each agency. For example, in 2020, the GTG supported the biggest 16 Days of Activism Against GBV in Mongolia so far, which sought to raise awareness and encourage action to end GBV at home, at work, and in public places. The campaign, led by UNFPA which chairs the Outcome 3 and UNGTG, was joined by over 20 organizations from the UN system, government partners, development partners, the private sector, and civil society. Development partners and CSOs interviewed appreciate this initiative, which is complemented by a focus on gender advocacy and policies on GBV and gender equality. The social and mass media initiatives reached at least 3.93 million people/times.

Gender has generally been an area of focus, in particular in 2021 with the impact of the pandemic, and worrisome trends on gender inequalities and gender-based violence. The UN has been working to combat gender inequality and violence by applying international norms in Mongolia such as those from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survivor protection system and perpetrator intervention for GBV and violence against children are growing efforts to face the increase in the number of the cases observed during the lockdown. During this UNDAF cycle, significant policies that protect and uphold the rights of women, men, and children against GBV were approved and programmes were rolled out to ensure its successful implementation (technical support, capacity building, funding, etc). The KOICA-UNDP project on "Promoting gender equality in public decision-making and women's empowerment

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<sup>18</sup> ANNEX I Guidance for applying UN Info Gender Equality and Human Rights Markers to UN Joint Workplans

<sup>19</sup> UNCT Delivery Status, 2017-2020 Progress, Altansuvd Tumursukh, RCO, August 2021, slide 14.

in Mongolia” has been initiated in 2021 to increase the presence of women representatives at decision-making level. Raising awareness of GEWE are expected to contribute to transformational changes in the long run.

UNDP conducted a study jointly with the ADB and the National Committee for Gender Equality, which looked at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in particular on women and girls, that could further exacerbate existing inequalities while threatening to roll back the progress made towards the SDGs in Mongolia. The study assessed the pandemic’s impact on women and girls in Mongolia in four interlinked areas—social service, employment and income, government response measures and vulnerability.<sup>20</sup>

- The UN contributed to Mongolia’s success in upholding and promoting gender equality in Mongolia through amendments and implementation of different laws. Development partners stressed that the UN also provided technical and financial support to develop standard operating procedures, guidelines, and codes to guide the implementation of the laws across sectors, such as LCDV - 33 SOPs were developed and approved within the UNDAF Cycle. Under the LCDV, DV is deemed a criminal offense. This was key in DV prevention and response as it creates legal consequences for perpetrators, as well as legal mechanisms to protect survivors from further harm and accountability mechanisms for perpetrators. LCDV also included important provisions on: multi-sectoral coordination on GBV/DV prevention and response; witness protection; mandatory and voluntary rehabilitation for perpetrators; definitions and delineation of roles of relevant agencies, including the establishment of a special unit at the National Police Agency (NPA) for GBV/DV; and the accreditation of NGOs to provide services such as OSSC/shelter management and training.
- Revised Crime Prevention Law - criminalized acts of DV, and added methods for GBV data collection.
- Revised Law on Misconduct Violations - formalized the responsibilities of civil servants on DV prevention and response.
- Revised Family Law with added methods for GBV data collection, laws to address human trafficking, and to strengthen the national CP mechanism.

With these legal frameworks in place, coupled with extensive advocacy work by the UN and CSOs, government commitment toward GBV prevention and response improved -- as evidenced by the significant increase in state and local budget spending on GBV issues. This was further supported by the UN through capacity building and sensitization interventions, including the establishment of a GBV Training Hall at the National Committee for Gender Equality and the Training and Research Centre of the Family, Child and Youth Development Agency, as well as the extensive training of duty-bearers on the identification of, and service provision to victims of trafficking.

A very first nation-wide survey on gender-based violence, which used internationally recognized methodologies, was carried out by the National Statistics Office (NSO) with technical assistance by UNFPA, under the name “Women’s life health and life experience”.

The UN is credited for the increased participation of men in the prevention and suppression of all forms of violence and gender-based violence, to eradicate gender stereotypes and harmful habits, and to raise public awareness of respect for each other’s dignity and rights.

In the future, more collaboration would be needed between the Results Groups and the GTG to regularly monitor the gender sensitivity and responsiveness of interventions implemented under the new UNSDCF, and joint programmes among UN agencies. This would require the explicit consideration of

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<sup>20</sup> [Covid Impact Assessment on Women and Girls in Mongolia](#), Final, 20 March 2021

gender issues in project documents, agreement on gender-responsive indicators at the project and/or UNSDCF levels, and clarity on the responsible agencies who should report against them.

Although GEWE is actively advocated by the UN, the real impact is still not conclusive. There are still more men at the decision-making level while women work mainly at the executive level in the country. There is a significant gap in male and female life expectancies (around 9-10 years). Therefore, there is also a need to focus on men when the gender gap is discussed. Men have an important role to play in all aspects of GEWE.

## **2. Human Rights-Based Approach**

**EQ: Has the UNDAF properly addressed human-rights issues and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)? How was HRBA integrated into UNDAF design, implementation, monitoring and reporting?**

**Finding:** The UN is one of the more consistent voices on human rights, and encourages Mongolia to implement human rights conventions. According to the UN-INFO human rights marker, 92 percent of the UNDAF interventions have addressed the promotion of human rights, which shows that the current UNDAF has focused on human rights and contributed to the fulfilment of Mongolia's international and regional commitments and obligations. Nonetheless, the UNDAF document did not pay a significant attention to HRBA and the observations and recommendations of the UPR and other HR mechanisms. There are also certain observations and recommendations repeatedly provided by the mechanisms, which were not addressed by the government. The Human Rights Team Group was created at the end of 2020, and met only twice, and there has been no active engagement with Outcome Groups. The HRBA is not clearly reflected and translated at the Government policy level. Meanwhile, CSOs claim that Civil Society has a more curtailed space than before, and that human rights have been threatened by the restrictive measures taken during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded everybody the importance of human rights and HRBA in all sectors.

The UN has been advocating on human-rights issues and the HRBA, as a key cross-cutting principle. The UNDAF Outcome 3 (output 1) addresses the principle. There is also a specific indicator that looks into the progress in implementing the UPR and Treaty Bodies recommendations in Mongolia (3.1.1).

The UN is one of the more consistent voices on human rights, and encourages Mongolia to implement human rights conventions, after it has signed and ratified them. Mongolia submitted the third UPR report and received recommendations in March 2020. The UNCT compiled its report which fed into the UPR process. The 2020 RC & UNCT Performance Appraisal reported that, as of 2020, 90% of the CEDAW recommendations and 86.1% of the UPR recommendations have been accepted by the GoM, and are currently being implemented primarily under the Law on Promotion of Gender Equality and the LCDV. The UN has also been supporting the GoM in improving the legal framework to protect and uphold human rights, including the right to freedom from violence, as well as in implementing and monitoring these laws.

Outcome 3 contributed to the promotion of international human rights treaties and conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and international gender equality commitments. UNICEF closely monitored the implementation of the concluding observations provided by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, contributing to the fulfilment of child rights in the country. Accordingly, UNICEF advocated for the development of a National Plan of Action on Human Rights, to facilitate the government's follow-up to the implementation of Treaty Bodies and the UPR recommendations. The UN has urged social dialogues with the government on labour-issues and provided recommendations on human rights review mechanism in the framework of the UPR.

The human rights issues have been mainstreamed throughout UN projects. The UN also supported crucial reforms to promote human rights, such as the protection of the rights of workers with revision of labour law and ratification of the ILO Convention for Safety and Health in Construction (No.167) through strengthening of social dialogue among the Government, employers and workers and support to transition of informal workers to formality. For the first time in Asia, Mongolia passed the Human Rights Defender Law with the support of the UN in 2020. Additionally, the UN provided technical and financial assistance to promote good governance, transparency and accountability within the GoM, particularly through the Law on Administrative & Territorial Units and their Governance as well as through civil service reform that seeks to improve the efficiency and quality of the government recruitment process. To complement these legislative reforms, the UN also assisted the GoM in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these key laws through the conduct of standalone assessments and by supporting the establishment of mechanisms and procedures for regular monitoring. The results of these efforts were used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these laws that protect and uphold human rights in the country.

The development of the current UNDAF, according to the Human Rights Theme Group, did not pay specific attention or refer to the observations and recommendations of the UPR and other mechanisms. There are also certain observations and recommendations repeatedly provided by the mechanisms, but not adequately addressed by the government, and the UNCT's role is important in this regard.

As of March 2021, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) observed that while CEDAW recommendations are being implemented at 90%, attention should be paid to the implementation of other international treaties and conventions, including those on climate change and the environment.<sup>21</sup> Following the UPR recommendation for establishing a coordination, synchronization mechanism and information sharing between sectors, the NHRC took the opportunity of the meeting to request the UN to provide support not only at Ministry level, but also at Government and Cabinet Secretariat level in establishing such a mechanism. The evaluation team suggests that the UNCT may want to use the OHCHR guidance on National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up, in order to support Mongolia in this endeavour.<sup>22</sup> Another issue hindering the implementation of international treaties and conventions is the translation of human rights documents in Mongolian. The NHRC also reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded everybody the importance of human rights in all sectors, and the need to step up work towards on Leaving No One Behind.

As reported in the latest Steering Committee minutes (March 2021), 92 percent of the UNDAF interventions have addressed the promotion of human rights in Mongolia, based on UN-INFO human rights markers, according the predetermined scale mentioned in the section above on gender. This shows that the current UNDAF has focused on human rights and contributed to the fulfilment of Mongolia's international and regional commitments and obligations. Like for gender, the agencies' Headquarters have encouraged their Country Offices to mainstream human rights in their interventions, and HRBA has been reflected into UNDAF design, implementation, and reporting. However, Human Rights Theme Group (HRTG), was created at the end of 2020, and met only twice. There has been no direct or active engagement of Outcome Groups with the HRTG, and vice versa. This is definitely a serious gap that needs attention.

The UN has constructively advocated with the Government, using some experts' visits. For example, in 2019, the UN invited a Human Rights High Commissioner's Independent Expert on the issue of debt and human rights.<sup>23</sup> Mongolia also hosted the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights

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<sup>21</sup> Steering Committee meeting minutes, March 2021.

<sup>22</sup> National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up, A Practical Guide to Effective State Engagement with International Human Rights Mechanisms, UNOHCHR, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> [End-of-mission statement by the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt - Visit Mongolia](#)

defenders, and a law was drafted. The UN Mongolia also implemented a localized Free and Equal campaign on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people (LGBTI), supported by OHCHR.

However, several development partners indicated that it is difficult to point out where the UNDAF contributed concretely at the higher policy level on the HRBA. The role of the UN in promoting human rights and the rights approach could be strengthened, in order to obtain concrete changes at policy level. Building on its political and human rights mandate, the RC and UN agencies could use more of the leverage that they have, together with all the donors, to convey stronger messages to the Government. The communication of the UN human rights interventions in development partners' meetings and other venues has been limited, and this would be very useful for development partners. The Outcome Groups also pointed out that the UN has not been as strong as it could have, in advocating for the respect of human rights during the political emergency of the pandemic.

A more integrated approach to advocacy, with the RC, UN agencies, Development partners, CSOs, etc., would make the UN messages, including on sensitive issues, stronger.

The Human Rights Theme Group noted that the UN interventions heavily focused on the capacity building of duty-bearers. The UNDAF has not really focused on the root causes of inequalities, vulnerability and discrimination especially in the area of human rights. Rather it has mainly focused on policy issues. That is one of the missing links in the current UNDAF. This observation has not yet been triangulated by the evaluation team.

It is worthy to note that, on the other hand, CSOs feel that Civil Society has a more curtailed space than before, and human rights have been threatened with restrictive measures taken during the pandemic.

### **3. Leaving No One Behind**

**EQ: How have those often left behind benefitted from the UNDAF (including vulnerable groups, marginalized women and children, persons with disabilities, minority groups, elderly, refugees/asylum seekers, migrants, low-income families, LGBTI community, etc.)**

**Finding:** The current UNDAF document has not precisely defined the vulnerable groups for addressing the principle Leave No One Behind. The groups such as elderly, people with disabilities, LGBTQIs, ethnic minorities, and people in prisons have been hardly covered by the UN interventions. Other sensitive issues include gender-based violence and sexual violence against children. In addition, the indicators were not disaggregated by vulnerable groups to see if these groups benefitted from the UNDAF. Moreover, poverty and inequality have been even exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that more situations of vulnerability need to be taken into consideration.

By design, UNDAF Output 3.1. (*Improved normative protection mechanisms*) targets vulnerable groups, with indicator 3.1.2 (*Specific comprehensive policy measures and legislation are adopted and effectively implemented against discrimination of all kinds, especially women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTI and others*), and indicator 3.1.3 (*Prevalence rate of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*). All outputs under the Outcome 2 have tried to reach the most behind groups. An example is the UNICEF WASH component.

However, the current UNDAF document has not precisely defined the vulnerable groups for addressing the principle Leave No One Behind. During the UNDAF implementation, the Leave No One Behind has been discussed on an ad-hoc basis. Some groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities, LGBTIs, ethnic minorities, and people in prisons have hardly been covered by UN interventions. Other sensitive issues including gender-based violence and sexual violence against children, issues show worrisome

trends. There is an important need to address these sensitive issues, through structured discussions, with development partners.

Nonetheless, the UN has supported nutrition for children with disabilities. Under the Outcome area 2, more than 250,000 people have benefited from the climate change-resistant WASH project. In the education sector, the UN support has reached children of ethnic minorities with different language and culture and children in remote areas, by translating e-lessons into their languages, and providing audio lessons and equipment. The cooperation is focused on providing equitable, inclusive and LNOB education services.

The indicators would have to be disaggregated by vulnerable groups to see if these groups really benefitted from the UNDAF interventions. There are specific indicators looking at the disparities between different wealth quintiles and inclusion of children with disabilities in education opportunities. However, the current data mechanism does not allow to have good insights on the issues that the most left behind groups face.

The project designs often consider groups with vulnerability and living in poverty. However, Leave No One Behind may not be clearly addressed in the reporting processes. In addition, poverty and inequality have been even exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so the vulnerability needs to be seriously taken into consideration. Since the left behind groups are not static, there is a need for a flexible monitoring system to timely determine who are those groups. There is also a need for further focus on the groups with intersectional vulnerabilities, to ensure interventions are accessible and responsive to their needs.

Several development partners indicated that the legal environment is very constrained for LGBTQI people. This is a tricky issue to engage in an extremely masculine society. There is considerable discrimination against them and ethnic minorities (i.e., Kazaks). The UN should make it a priority, but it seldom participates in relevant forum discussions.

Other LNOB issues have been addressed through multi-dimensional poverty analysis (UNICEF), universal approach to social protection (UNFPA), air pollution for most at risk (UNICEF), and internal migration (IOM). With respect to marginalized women and children who experience GBV, policies and facilities have been established within this UNDAF to ensure survivor protection and perpetrator accountability mechanisms.

With respect to youth, several interventions have been conducted on youth, during the implementation of the current UNDAF. The Law on Promoting Youth Development was adopted in Mongolia for the first time in 2017 and became effective in January 2018. Important technical support was provided by UNFPA in the implementation of the Law, including the approval of guidelines, the development of youth database, the national youth programme, and the approval of the guidelines for the implementation of new law. Also, the UN supported capacity building of all YDCs staff and officers in-charge of youth issues at AFCYD; and organization of a National Forum on youth participation by the MLSP jointly with CSOs in sustainable development to discuss youth issues, future plans, and to listen to young people from nationwide Mongolia. The 4th National YD Forum was held with the theme "Youth Development Know-How" to discuss experiences, share good practices, and to discuss the Law on Promoting Youth Development. The government, as per the Law, allocated MNT 1.2 billion for the first time for implementing its new youth development functions under the Law on Promoting Youth Development.

The UN and the Government also jointly facilitated participatory platforms for young people leading to the establishment of 331 sub-national youth councils in 21 provinces, 301 soums and 8 districts of Ulaanbaatar. The UN supported the establishment of the Decent Work for Youth Network, with government and non-governmental organizations, to promote labour rights among young men and

women. On the ground, the UN worked with 117 young volunteers (of which 60 were girls) to raise awareness about COVID-19 prevention, as well as to conduct rapid assessments related to the pandemic.

#### **4. Consideration of environmental implications**

**EQ: To what extent has the UN system support designed and delivered in due consideration to environmental implications?**

Although environmental implications are discussed across the programmes and projects, the integration in the implementation is limited. UNDP uses social and environmental standards across a number of its projects.<sup>24</sup>

At the national level, the UN supported the Green Development Agenda. Through the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), the UN continued to support Mongolia's green development agenda by mainstreaming and integrating SDGs and Integrated Green Economy principles into construction sector policy and capacity building interventions including the development of a training module and integration of green principles into higher education curriculums of the National University of Mongolia, Mongolian State University of Life Science, University of Finance and Economics, and National University of Commerce and Business.

In Outcome 2, for the WASH intervention, the integration of environmental implications focuses on the climate resilient WASH facilities. In addition, the UNICEF health programme considers air pollution and the climate change implications of its activities. However, there is no monitoring mechanism to determine if a particular intervention has taken due consideration of environmental implications.

The CSOs criticize that the government activities in regard to environment implications of projects are not transparent, and policies are vague. The UN could help the Government to conduct impact assessments on the environment of future policies in various sectors and to use proper methodology and research tools, such as the Environmental Strategic Assessment.

#### **5. Disability inclusion**

**EQ: How was disability inclusion integrated into UNDAF design, implementation, monitoring and reporting?**

Although disability inclusion is discussed across programmes and projects, the integration into implementation is rarely considered, even if it depends on the programmes and projects. An inter-agency task force was formed on this issue. Different agencies have their own specific focus. For instance, UNICEF focuses on children with disabilities, and of different backgrounds, and children whose parents have disabilities. The UNICEF education programme heavily focuses on children with disabilities. While UNESCO conducted training on disability, UNFPA together with the HR Commission conducted a small survey on disability (sexual rights and violence). For other outputs and interventions, it is hard to say that disability inclusion is well integrated into the UNDAF.

As part of the CCA elaboration in 2016, consultations were held with PWDs from the GBV perspective. However, in the current UNDAF, no specific interventions were introduced to address PWD survivors, due to the lack of capacity in this specific area.

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<sup>24</sup> See UNDP's [Social and Environmental Standards](#).

## V. Limitations and Lessons Learned

This section presents the limitations of and lessons learned from this UNDAF evaluation, in order to ensure best practice in future UNSDCF evaluations.

The TOR for this evaluation were very complete and reflected the renewed importance given to the UNDAF evaluations. This was in line with the new requirements, demands and higher expectations placed on UNSDCF evaluations, as framed by the newly issued UNDAF Evaluation Guidelines (September 2021). There are numerous technical requirements in these guidelines, some of which new, which lead to a significant effort for conducting these complex evaluations.

The TOR foresaw the hiring of a company, with a team composed of 3 evaluators (1 international and 2 nationals). The number of working days for this evaluation were 70 working days for the international consultant, 64 days for one of the national consultants and 44 days for the other national consultant. This is considered appropriate, but is a bare minimum for an evaluation of this kind, and given the new requirements for UNSDCF evaluations. Having the most experienced national consultant with more days was useful since the team leader could depend on him more, and for tasks that required more experience.

The TOR included in the evaluation guidelines recommended having a team of 3 to 5 evaluators depending on the number of thematic areas of the UNSDCF. The rationale is to be able to constitute a multidisciplinary team with adequate expertise and experience to adequately evaluate the specific areas. According to this UNDAF evaluation experience, and previous experience of the evaluation team, it seems, however, exaggerated to have 3 to 5 national consultants hired by a company for these evaluations, as suggested in the new guidelines. Adding more consultants would not necessarily improve the quality of UNSDCF evaluations.

In the case of Mongolia, the 3 consultants covered the 3 outcomes (one outcome each). However, the analysis of results of the 3 different areas responded to mainly one question (among the 22 evaluation questions). This question was: "Please describe what outputs have been achieved for each UNDAF outcome? Where are the gaps, with respect to what was expected?). All the other 21 questions did not require a specialist in the outcome areas, and were not specific to these areas. Even that question did not require a specialist in the outcome areas. Therefore, when forming evaluation teams, having specialists in programme areas should not be over-emphasized in the UNSDCF evaluation guidelines. Instead, what was needed in this evaluation were consultants with a strong evaluation experience, with knowledge of the UNDAF.

Indeed, UNSDCF evaluations are a lot about Relevance and "processes" like Effectiveness, Sustainability, Coherence, Efficiency, and Guiding principles. Also, there is no need to look for primary data, and it is more about appreciating the "contribution" to very high-level outcomes, as documented in the UNDAF Annual Progress Reports. So having a consultant for each UNDAF area was not really what was most needed in this evaluation.

For the international consultant, coordinating the work of the national consultants requires a very significant management time. The more consultants the team leader has to work with, the more he/she has to coordinate and manage their work. In addition, the international consultant has to work with the consulting firm / research institution that hires the team. He/she has also to work with the evaluation manager, the evaluation consultative group, the evaluation committee, and respond to comments from the RCO, the UNCT, other UN staff, DCO and the regional team, as well as counterparts. All of this is extremely and increasingly complex and time-consuming. The evaluation arrangements are very intricate, with many actors involved. Thus, evaluations of the UNSCDF are increasingly going to

require a significant management time. The more an evaluation will have consultants, the more this will be obvious. This management requirements will most likely be at the detriment of the data collection, analysing the information collected to reply to the evaluation questions, reading documents, looking for experiences from other countries, being updated on latest UN Reform discussions, formulating good findings, offering useful conclusions and recommendations, etc.

The requirements on the TOC analysis, made to the evaluation consultants during the inception phase, were quite time consuming for this evaluation. Part of it was due to a learning by doing approach, and instruments that were shared by DCO during the course of the evaluation, and that needed some improvements to be used at their full potential. The absence of a proper TOC in the UNDAF document is also to blame for the time spent on this issue, but in the end, this TOC analysis did not bring much value added to the evaluation process.

The team also over invested time for the stakeholder analysis during the inception. The process leading the team, RCO and UN agencies to decide who was going to participate to the data collection process, could have been much shorter. Given the quantity of stakeholders in the implementation of an UNDAF, an evaluation team should not be expected to undertake such a time-consuming selection process, and at least a first list should be ready for the consultants' consideration, before the inception phase starts. This would also speed up the process of contacting stakeholders by email or formal letters, which was time consuming for both the RCO and the evaluation team. In addition, the process of gathering the exact names and contact information of the selected interviewees, took more time than planned, even if it was followed by a very efficient RCO action with the letters.

The data collection phase was very successful, since the evaluation team got 47 interviews or questionnaire replies out of 52 that we solicited. This is an excellent response rate and result, achieved thanks to a diligent effort from the IRIM team, with several reminders and direct phone calls, all of which with the support of the three evaluators. As a result, the evaluation team interviewed or met in meetings a total of 108 different people, organized 37 interviews or meetings, and received 20 written replies to different questionnaires from different individuals or groups, representing government institutions, development partners, UN agencies staff, CSOs, academia and private sector.

The consultants had originally suggested to ask Outcome Groups to fill up a Questionnaire, based on the evaluation criteria and evaluation questions. This would have been an opportunity for members of these groups to reflect collectively on these questions, during a generous three weeks timeframe. The consultants wanted to ask each Outcome Group to provide a single consolidated reply to this Questionnaire. The Outcome Groups' members were expected to reach a consensus on their replies, however, they would have also been able to express diverse opinions in response to questions. The Outcome Groups Co-chairs would have been expected to provide quality assurance in the finalization of the questionnaire replies. If needed, the information gathered through the questionnaire replies would have been complemented by short meetings with each of the Outcome Groups to fine-tune the replies to the questionnaire, with a direct exchange with the consultants.

However, this methodology was changed, and it was decided to only organize meetings to interview the Outcome Groups online. As a result, the inputs received by the consultants through these meetings were not as precise as the ones that would have been written in questionnaire replies. Down the road, it was more difficult to triangulate information received, to analyze it, and to write the report. In turn, this led to many comments on the draft about single opinion-based statements without sufficient evidence. The lesson is that the use of a questionnaire with short complementary meetings would have been much more useful for the evaluation than only meetings with the Outcome Groups.

Another lesson is that the Thematic Groups, the Working Groups and other key informants (Government, Development Partners, Academia, CSOs and the Private Sector) who also participated in

the data collection, appreciated to be given the choice to either reply to a targeted questionnaire in written format or to be interviewed by the evaluators. In most cases, questionnaire replies provided much more specific inputs than interviews to the evaluation team.

Because the inception phase was more time-consuming than originally foreseen, the evaluation team suggested to discontinue its work on the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and abandon them as an additional data collection method, which was considered not-necessary for this strategic level evaluation. The team was concerned with the additional work and processes involved with the Focus Group Discussions. In the past, and in general, UNDAF evaluators were not required to organize FGDs, which are also complex to organize (and even more so in the COVID19 context), and raise many issues about how representative they really are. They can also require time from UN agencies.

The agreement to drop this activity helped the team completing an ambitious data collection process by September 30<sup>th</sup>, and deliver the draft report on time by October 31<sup>st</sup>, which many Government representatives and many UN colleagues had insisted upon. To replace the information that could have been provided by the FGDs, the evaluation team gathered additional evidence to assess the UN agencies' programme and project implementation aligned with UNDAF at the local level, in particular by reviewing in detail 17 evaluations of UN agencies' projects and programmes.

## VI. Summary Performance Rating

According to the new UNEG Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (August 2021)<sup>25</sup>, this section, called "Summary Performance Rating", is expected to "be submitted by the evaluation team with the final evaluation report to facilitate regional and global performance synthesis. The rating system of evaluations is recommended: to simplify the identification of levels of performance by decision-makers; to help aggregate results; and to enhance the provision of consolidated reporting back to governments in programme countries, as well as to governing bodies. See Annex 14: Summary Performance Rating.

## VII. Conclusions

**Conclusion 1:** At the design stage, the UNDAF was aligned with the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030., which very well reflected the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During implementation, the UN has adapted its work and responded to the emerging and unforeseen needs of the country. The most prominent adaptability is undoubtedly the UN collective response to COVID-19. *Linked to evaluation criteria A. Relevance and adaptability, and key evaluation question: Is the UNDAF doing the right things?*

**Conclusion 2:** Some indicators are formulated in a way that does not allow for the effective M&E of results. Several indicators are high and too ambitious for the UN to make significant contributions. An indicators validation exercise / evaluability exercise could have been useful to ensure the suitability of the results matrix to measure results. A ToC would have been useful to ensure that the outputs were sufficient for the achievement of the Outcomes, with suitable indicators that can capture all the UN contributions. For the next UNSDCF, the evaluation team considers that the UN will need to be realistic in terms of outputs, outcomes, indicators and targets formulation, to ensure that the results can be

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<sup>25</sup> Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), August 2021.

measured and the contribution of the UN determined. *Linked to evaluation criteria B. Effectiveness, and key evaluation question: Is the UNDAF achieving its objectives?*

**Conclusion 3:** In Outcome 1, the UN plausibly contributed to the legal environment for national development policy planning and budgeting and expansion of the protected area network in Mongolia. For Outcome 2, the UN credibly contributed to the achievement of national targets on WASH, COVID-19 response in the health sector including vaccine, reduction of stunting, and sustaining the continuation of learning during the COVID-19 through an integrated approach to support tele-and e-learning along with CP services for children and families. In Outcome 3, improving the legal framework to protect and uphold human rights, including the right to freedom from violence (GBV/DV and violence against children), as well as in implementing and monitoring these laws can be regarded as a key plausible contribution to UNDAF outcomes. *Linked to evaluation criteria B. Effectiveness, and key evaluation question: Is the UNDAF achieving its objectives?*

**Conclusion 4:** Some of the main factors that contributed to progress towards UNDAF outcomes has been a clear long term development policy, and the legal environment. In terms of challenges, COVID-19, high turnover of government staff following the elections and associated loss of institutional memory has been a constraint in UNDAF implementation. *Linked to evaluation criteria: B. Effectiveness, and key evaluation question: Is the UNDAF achieving its objectives?*

**Conclusion 5:** There is an interesting experience of integrated programming through a joint programme, implemented by WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF in the Umnogobi province with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations. The evaluation team feels that this could be an experience to assess in order to see if this could be a possible model to address the geographic spread of UN interventions through a more integrated approach aiming at creating models of interventions that can then be replicated and scaled up. *Linked to evaluation criteria D. Coherence and coordination, and key evaluation question: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?*

**Conclusion 6:** There are many concrete examples of collaborative projects launched under the UNDAF that have been sustained by national partners and counterparts, or replicated and scaled up by the government. However, a lack of resources and scale-up or replication strategy hinder the potential to maintain UNDAF benefits over time. The government engagement is crucial for sustainability, and a financing mechanism could help to sustain UN interventions. The UNDAF was oriented towards having a real impact on people, and made a difference towards protecting the rights of people and their living environment, however, in some cases, it is too premature to fully evaluate the impact of its results. *Linked to evaluation criteria C. Sustainability and orientation towards impact, and key evaluation question: Will the benefits last? What difference does the UNDAF make?*

**Conclusion 7:** The UNDAF has not really served as an effective and strategic tool for the collective interventions of the UN system. Internal synergies are missing, except in a few joint programmes, however, these are generally not derived from the UNDAF, and are rather resource-driven, taking advantage of funding opportunities. While the UNDAF has not been very useful, at least it gave the broad directions for all UN agencies, and provided the big picture on which agencies tried to align, and a rationale for joint interventions and programming. *Linked to evaluation criteria D. Coherence and coordination, and key evaluation question: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?*

**Conclusion 8:** The UNDAF National Steering Committee, which met once a year, has not been involved in many substantive discussions, and there are opportunities in this direction. Organizing more regular meetings of the Steering Committee (twice or thrice a year), and dealing with more substantive issues, could ensure a more meaningful participation and increased ownership of high-level Government

officials in the future Cooperation Framework implementation. The Outcome Groups and the Thematic Groups met infrequently in this UNDAF cycle. There has been a limited role and involvement of both RCs involved in this UNDAF cycle, and of the UNCT, in the coordination of Outcome Groups. The evaluation team considers that the Outcome Groups could be co-chaired by UN agencies and the Government. *Linked to evaluation criteria D. Coherence and coordination, and key evaluation question: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?*

**Conclusion 9:** The Outcome Groups did not have substantive discussions involving government counterparts to review the results. The role of the OG Chairs is quite crucial in this sense. The rotation in the agencies chairing the OGs could help to make them more dynamic and offer the agencies a sense of a mission and of achievements after a period of two years for instance. Co-chairing an OG can most likely be done only by agencies on the ground with enough staff and capacity. *Linked to evaluation criteria D. Coherence and coordination, and key evaluation question: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?*

**Conclusion 10:** While the UNDAF document had foreseen to be made operational through the development of Joint Work Plans (JWPs) and/or agency-specific work plans and project documents, the Outcome Groups, the UNCT did not develop JWPs- in the format recommended by DCO in the UNDAF Guidelines, that they would have used to monitor the UNDAF implementation. JWPs have not been considered indispensable to implement the UNDAF. Instead, all projects implemented by UN agencies have been listed in the UN-INFO platform. As a result, it has been difficult to show common results. However, the UNCT, with the support of the Outcome Groups and RCO, analyzed and monitored all the UN interventions in Mongolia using the UNINFO since the UNDAF start which contributed to very well-documented UNDAF annual cumulative progress reports. *Linked to evaluation criteria D. Coherence and coordination, and key evaluation question: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?*

**Conclusion 11:** The UN has contributed to the coordination among the Government organizations by promoting the SDGs as the heart of long-term development policy of Mongolia. However, an enhanced cooperation would be needed with the Government, which should have a stronger ownership of the UNDAF implementation. The UNCT has a close relationship with development partners, and meetings stimulate possibilities of cooperation with UN Agencies. The UNCT and the RC are currently in the process of improving the coordination and cooperation between the UN and development partners through the establishment of ToR of the Development Partners Group and sub/thematic groups. There are also opportunities of collaboration with CSOs, the Academia, and the private sector, in the implementation of the UNDAF. *Linked to evaluation criteria D. Coherence and coordination, and key evaluation question: How well does the UNDAF fit? How well is the UNDAF implementation coordinated?*

**Conclusion 12:** The UN is one of the more consistent voices on human rights, and encourages Mongolia to implement human rights conventions, and the UNDAF has focused on human rights and contributed to the fulfilment of Mongolia's international and regional commitments and obligations. Nonetheless, the UNDAF document did not pay a significant attention to HRBA and the observations and recommendations of the UPR and other HR mechanisms. There are also certain observations and recommendations repeatedly provided by the mechanisms, which were not addressed by the government. The Human Rights Team Group was created at the end of 2020, and met only twice, and there has been no active engagement with Outcome Groups. The HRBA is not clearly reflected and translated at the Government policy level. Meanwhile, CSOs claim that Civil Society has a more curtailed space than before, and that human rights have been threatened by the restrictive measures taken during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded everybody the importance of human rights and HRBA in all sectors. *Linked to evaluation criteria F. Crosscutting programming principles, and key evaluation question: Have we left no one behind?*

**Conclusion 13:** The current UNDAF has not identified precisely the vulnerable groups for addressing the principle LNOB. During the UNDAF implementation, the LNOB has been discussed on an ad-hoc basis. The groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities, LGBTIs, ethnic minorities, and people in prisons have hardly been covered by UN interventions. Other sensitive issues include gender-based violence and sexual violence against children. There is an important need to address these sensitive issues, through structured discussions with Government, development partners, academia, CSOs, etc. In addition, the indicators were not disaggregated by vulnerable groups to see if these groups benefitted from the UNDAF. Moreover, poverty and inequality have been even more exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that more situations of vulnerability need to be taken into consideration. *Linked to evaluation criteria F. Crosscutting programming principles, and key evaluation question: Have we left no one behind?*

**Conclusion 14:** Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) has been taken into account in the UNDAF design and implementation of all outcomes, especially Outcome 3. Nonetheless, there have been no organic links and active engagement between Outcome Groups and the Gender Theme Group. The latter played and can play an important role to encourage discussions on issues related to gender. The group can facilitate a joint UN response to these issues, which capitalize on the different comparative advantages of each agency. With worrisome trends on gender inequalities and gender-based violence due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are opportunities for an increased attention to GEWE. There is also a need to focus on men when the gender gap is discussed, e.g., the significant gap in male and female life expectancies, and the role boys and men can play in GEWE. *Linked to evaluation criteria F. Crosscutting programming principles, and key evaluation question: Have we left no one behind?*

**Conclusion 15:** The Operational Management Team advanced common business operations to ensure greater economy of scale and reducing operations costs through common business processes in procurement. Transaction costs have decreased thanks to the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT), through a common operational framework for transferring cash to government and non-governmental partners. With the common back-office initiative, which is part of the UN reform efficiency agenda, transaction costs have the potential to further decrease. *Linked to evaluation criteria E. Efficiency, and key evaluation question: How well are resources being used?*

**Conclusion 16:** The UNDAF is supposed to be a resource mobilization tool for the Government and the UN, however, it is not supported by an integrated funding framework, and there are no adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda. In addition to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other Thematic Funds, potential areas for additional resource mobilization include South-South Cooperation, Public Private Partnerships, and government investment funds. In addition, the government financial contribution will also be needed for the next CF. *Linked to evaluation criteria E. Efficiency, and key evaluation question: How well are resources being used?*

## VIII. Recommendations

The evaluation team offers these recommendations, together with suggested actions to help implement them. Evaluators are aware, however, that the implementation of some actions may be on-going, including in the framework of the new Cooperation Framework preparations. Similarly, while recommendations are inspired by the experience of this UNDAF and by UN Reform, the evaluators recognize the challenges in enhancing the relevance, and effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and the guiding principles of the next Cooperation Framework. In addition, the evaluation team bears in mind that all capacities (technical, human, financial) may not be in place to fully respond to all recommendations.

These recommendations are therefore simply offered to stimulate thinking and concrete action around the UNDAF implementation in the context of the SDGs and UN Reform. This evaluation report and these recommendations will be followed by a mandatory management response and action plan drafted by the Evaluation Steering Committee.

Key Recommendations	Suggested actions
<p><b>Recommendation 1: The UNCT and government should improve the design and usefulness of the next UNSDCF as an instrument to capture a shared vision and mission in the context of the SDGs.</b></p> <p>High priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusions 1 and 2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use the latest edition of new guidelines for developing the new Cooperation Framework, especially the guiding principles, recommendations for design and preparation, the Theory of Change, and the definition of strategic priorities, outcomes, outputs and indicators, aligned with global SDG standards</li> <li>● For the next UNSDCF, develop a Results Framework including not only outcomes and indicators, but also outputs.</li> <li>● Formulate outcomes, outputs and indicators that can be clearly attributed to the UN Development System.</li> <li>● Consult with, and involve all key partners in a participatory way when developing expected results and indicators.</li> <li>● Conduct an indicators validation exercise / evaluability exercise once a year to ensure the suitability of the results matrix to measure results.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 2: The government should strengthen its ownership and strategic management of the next UNSDCF.</b></p> <p>High priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 8 and 11</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue efforts to strengthen government participation in, and ownership of, the UNSDCF (the Steering Committee should continue to provide strategic guidance to, and undertake a coordinated implementation of the UNSDCF, taking into consideration the nationalization process of the SDGs).</li> <li>● Provide inputs and support to the National Committee on Sustainable Development headed by the Prime Minister.</li> <li>● Organize more regular meetings of the UNSDCF Steering Committee (twice or thrice a year), reviewing results and dealing with more substantive issues, to ensure a more meaningful participation and increased ownership of high-level Government officials, in the Cooperation Framework implementation and strategic management. This could also include joint field missions to see the impact on beneficiaries, adjust strategies, and strengthen national ownership.</li> <li>● Have the Government co-chair the Outcome Groups to improve the ownership. Encourage the Government to pay special attention to the role of the National Development Agency to bring issues to be discussed and resolved at the meeting of the Sustainable Development Council Since the NDA acts as a bridge between the UN and the Government. Using the Sustainable Development Council and its Secretariat (the National Development Agency), there is a potential to improve the coordination of governmental, non-governmental, scientific and CSOs.</li> </ul>

Key Recommendations	Suggested actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Mongolia could request the UN to ensure its interventions are in better alignment with the Government Annual Action Plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 3: The UNCT should promote effective partnerships and strategic alliances around outcome areas and with a variety of stakeholders in order to enhance UNSDCF effectiveness.</b></p> <p>Medium priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote, strengthen, and develop a UNSDCF Partnership Strategy centered on UNSDCF Outcome areas and SDGs to enhance strategic alliances with different stakeholders to support its work on sustainable development including government, Parliament, local government, national human rights institutions, development partners, IFIs, NGOs, academic institutes and experts, the media and the private sector.</li> <li>• Involve NGOs and CSOs at a more strategic level in UNSDCF design and implementation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 4: The UNCT is invited to strengthen joint programming, resource mobilization and implement joint targeted programmes, while taking into account geographic spread of UN interventions, integrated programming, and geographical targeting experiences</b></p> <p>Medium priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 5</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilize resources for, and implement targeted “joint programmes” that are carefully chosen after a cost-benefit analysis, reflecting complementarities amongst UN agencies to collectively work together on common national development priorities, and where there is the possibility for higher-level results and reduced duplication of efforts in particularly strategic areas.</li> <li>• UNCT should continue to implement and further develop targeted “joint programming” activities, where the possibility of higher-level results exists and reduced duplication of efforts, in particularly strategic areas.</li> <li>• Envisage to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the UN working with a dispersed population, which can make it difficult to deliver certain programmes.</li> <li>• Monitor and evaluate the inter-agency integrated programming in the Umnogobi province, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations, implemented by WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, to see if this could be a possible model to address the geographic spread of UN interventions through a more integrated approach aiming at creating models of interventions that can then be replicated and scaled up.</li> <li>• Consider during the preparation of the next Cooperation Framework, and during its future implementation, the experiences and discussions on geographic spread of UN interventions, integrated programming, and geographical targeting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 5: UN agencies should implement the UNSDCF and increase their cooperation through the Outcome and Thematic Groups, and use them to help the UNCT managing the UNSDCF strategically, with the RC/UNCT leadership.</b></p> <p>High priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 7, 8, 9, and 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen internal cooperation and synergies between agencies involved in the implementation of the UNSDCF to reach higher-level results, through Outcome Groups, which could be co-chaired by UN agencies and the Government. .</li> <li>• Rotate the agencies co-chairing the Outcome Groups, for instance every two years, to make them more dynamic and offer the agencies a sense of a mission and achievements.</li> <li>• Have regular Outcome Groups’ meetings (for example quarterly) to ensure proper implementation and monitoring, and to support the UNCT in strategically managing the UNSDCF with the use of JWPs and a simple M&amp;E Framework.</li> <li>• Strengthen Outcome Groups’ efforts to ensure strong mainstreaming of programming principles in their JWPs and strategies (especially LNOB, HRBA and GEWE), with the support of the Gender and Human Rights</li> </ul>

Key Recommendations	Suggested actions
	<p>Thematic Groups, through regular meetings between the OGs and the TGs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have the Outcome and Thematic Groups report on a regular basis to the UNCT.</li> <li>● Incorporate the UNSDCF related tasks undertaken by agencies' staff in their job descriptions, and have proper incentives to enhance their motivation and commitment to joint work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 6: The UNCT and government should strengthen their use of effective RBM and M&amp;E systems to strategically monitor and manage the UNSDCF.</b></p> <p>Medium priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthen RBM and M&amp;E systems to better capture results in the future and demonstrate UN comparative advantage in contributing to national priorities by building on a robust Results Matrix and M&amp;E Framework.</li> <li>● Design a simple M&amp;E Framework that can clearly help the UNCT to strategically monitor progress of outputs and outcomes, and for the whole UNSDCF, with only essential information. This would be more user-friendly for decision-makers – the format of JWPs are more adapted for the technical level. Use for instance the user-friendly model of the M&amp;E Framework developed by the evaluation team in this report, in Annex 10: UNDAF M&amp;E Framework -- Current Progress of the Indicators.</li> <li>● Expected results need to be attributable to the UNDS to ensure accountability and show results. The UNSDCF should include a robust set of results that are measurable and realistic, and for which agencies can be held accountable. Accountability is one of the guiding principles for the new UNSDCF. Expected results (outcomes and outputs), indicators, baselines and targets that should be in line with the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-oriented and Time-bound).</li> <li>● Revise regularly the Results Matrix and M&amp;E Framework during UNSDCF implementation to ensure that expected results, indicators, baselines and targets, remain valid and in line with SMART criteria.</li> <li>● Keep the M&amp;E Group supporting and guiding UNSDCF monitoring and implementation against the M&amp;E Framework, and contributing to Outcome Groups' work, with support from the UN RCO.</li> <li>● Strengthen RBM and M&amp;E capacities within organizations on a regular basis, and develop the management for results culture.</li> <li>● Intensify efforts to build national capacities in evaluation to strengthen RBM, evaluation culture, evidence-based learning, and accountability for development results.</li> <li>● Highlight the importance of evaluations of UN agencies' programmes and projects to better evaluate the impact of the UNDAF, not only at national level but also at local level.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 7: The UNCT, the National Statistics Office, and ministries should strengthen collaboration in view of improving national capacities for disaggregated data collection, analysis, dissemination and use, especially given their importance for measuring progress on the SDGs and next UNSDCF implementation.</b></p> <p>Medium priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthen national capacities for disaggregated data collection including of big data, analysis, dissemination and use.</li> <li>● Continue to provide capacity building support in developing methodologies for data collection and analysis, and to apply best practices from other countries and UNDESA methodologies but tailor them to the national context for both the UNSDCF and SDGs.</li> <li>● Use the recent OHCHR guide "Human Rights-Based Approach to Data, Leaving No One Behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" to reinforce data collection, analysis and usage.</li> </ul>

Key Recommendations	Suggested actions
<p><b>Recommendation 8: The UNCT should ensure greater mainstreaming of the UNSDCF guiding principle Leave No One Behind and the Human Rights-Based Approach under the leadership of the RC.</b></p> <p>High priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 12 and 13</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Put Leave No One Behind (LNOB), along with the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) at the centre of the next UNSDCF as cross-cutting principles, essential for achieving all outcomes together with other guiding principles specified in the revised June 2019 UNSDCF Guidelines.</li> <li>● Ensure that the development of the next UNSDCF pays enough attention to the observations and recommendations of the UPR and other HR mechanisms.</li> <li>● Continue to provide technical support to Government and CSOs, through the Human Rights Thematic Group, on the reporting to the UPR and Human Rights Treaty Bodies.</li> <li>● Provide support to Ministry, Government and Cabinet Secretariat, with the NHRC, in establishing a coordination mechanism and information sharing between sectors, to follow-up the implementation of UPR and other Treaty Bodies’ recommendations, using the OHCHR guidance on National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up.</li> <li>● Ensure that future updates of the CCA identify well who are the vulnerable, where they are situated, what their needs are, and elaborate on how the UN can contribute best to address their evolving situation.</li> <li>● Develop continuously the knowledge of government counterparts on the needs of vulnerable groups and the importance of disaggregated data.</li> <li>● Train regularly UN programme staff, government officials, and other partners to build their capacities on LNOB, HRBA and GEWE.</li> <li>● Develop specific checklists and indicators with clear baselines and targets to ensure coordinated and regular monitoring and use of the principles, as well as reporting on their implementation in annual reviews and progress reports.</li> <li>● Dedicate some time in some UNCT meetings and in development partners’ meetings to discuss human rights issues to identify common strategies or activities.</li> <li>● Strengthen advocacy and the dialogue between the UN and the Government, on sensitive issues, through structured discussions, by involving UN Agencies, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), CSOs and Development Partners, and by leveraging the role of the RC, in the spirit of the newly issued guidelines. A more integrated approach to advocacy, with these actors, would make the UN messages stronger and could lead to concrete changes at policy level, on issues such as gender-based violence and sexual violence against children, discrimination against LGBTIs and ethnic minorities, elderly, young people in rural areas, herders, people with disabilities, people in prisons, etc.</li> <li>● Make sure that the next UNSDCF identifies precisely the vulnerable groups for addressing the principle Leave No One Behind (LNOB).</li> <li>● Have the UNCT/RC and development partners continue paying attention to all human rights (economic, social, cultural, civil and political).</li> <li>● Strengthen the role of the Human Rights Theme Group with more regular meetings and activities with Outcome Groups.</li> <li>● Attribute a specific budget to the Human Rights Theme Group for regular awareness-raising activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 9: The UNCT should ensure a greater mainstreaming of the UNSDCF guiding principle on gender equality and women’s empowerment.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider having a gender specific outcome on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment or reflect GEWE in the next UNSDCF design as a cross-cutting principle (in terms of specific goals and targets set, gender disaggregated data and indicators).</li> <li>● Increase collaboration between the Results Groups and the Gender Theme Group to regularly monitor the gender sensitivity and responsiveness of</li> </ul>

Key Recommendations	Suggested actions
<p>High priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 14</i></p>	<p>interventions implemented under the new UNSDCF and joint programmes among UN agencies. This would require the explicit consideration of GEWE in project documents, agreement on gender-responsive indicators at the project and/or UNSDCF levels, and clarity on the responsible agencies who should report against them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase synergies among agencies for projects or activities on gender that are implemented individually, have complementarity value, and strengthen UN comparative advantage</li> <li>● Have an empowered Gender Theme Group play an important role to encourage discussions on emerging issues in Mongolia related to gender, including climate change and humanitarian response, and come up with a joint UN response to these issues that capitalize on the different comparative advantages of each agency, under the leadership of the subject matter-expert agencies</li> <li>● Also focus on men when the gender gap is discussed (e.g., the significant gap in male and female life expectancies, and the role men can play in GEWE.</li> <li>● Allocate a separate budget to gender (by the UN RCO or UN Agencies) to support the strengthening of the capacity of the UN Gender Theme Group and UN Agencies, if possible with an enhanced Secretariat through a dedicated post.</li> <li>● Use performance indicators for GEWE suggested for UNCTs as part of the Gender Scorecard mechanism, to ensure a more coordinated and regular monitoring, use of the guiding principle on GEWE, and reporting on the implementation of this principle.</li> <li>● Refer to recent guidelines that can provide insights, such as the UNEG guidance on “UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator”, the UNDG “Resource Book for Mainstreaming Gender in UN Common Programming at the Country Level”, the UNDG “Resource Guide for UN Gender Theme Groups”, and UNEG “Guidelines for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 10:</b> The UNCT should promote an enabling environment for the participation and involvement of UN Non-Resident Agencies in UNSDCF processes, and these agencies should participate to the CF in a sustained effort.</p> <p>Low priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 7, 9 and 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue to promote an inclusive and enabling environment for the participation and involvement of Non-Resident Agencies in the CCA and UNSDCF processes, through effective coordination mechanisms, taking into account their capacities.</li> <li>● Allow the government to take full advantage of their unique expertise when working toward achieving national priorities.</li> <li>● If they are signing the next CF, they would have to be more actively involved, participate to the various groups, and they should not be only participating in a few events. Their participation to the CF should be a sustained effort, that should be carried through for 5 years, during the UNSDCF cycle.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 11:</b> The UNCT should Communicate as One through the United Nations’ Country Communications Group, and internally, there should be more organic links between this group and Outcome and Thematic Groups.</p> <p>Low priority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include the UNCG in the consultative processes for the next Cooperation Framework to enhance the role of communications and advocacy in its implementation.</li> <li>● Implement the Joint UN Communications Strategy that laid the foundation for the communications and advocacy work of the Cooperation Framework.</li> <li>● Plan and allocate financial and human resources for joint communications within the CF, and provide an empowering environment for UNCG members to achieve collective and joint communications as One UN. Include financial and human resources in agencies’ budgets for joint</li> </ul>

Key Recommendations	Suggested actions
<p><i>Linked to conclusion 8</i></p>	<p>communications by agencies, and for ad-hoc campaigns and communications initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthen the role of UN Communication Group to strategically use commemorative events for advocacy, including on sensitive issues (GBV, SRHR, etc.).</li> <li>● Incorporate UNSCDF tasks in job descriptions of the agencies' Communication Officers, to have proper incentives to enhance their motivation and commitment to joint UN works.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 12: The UNCT and the Government should strengthen the sustainability of the UNSDCF.</b></p> <p>Medium priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improve the sustainability of the UNDAF/UNSDCF by building on concrete examples of collaborative projects launched under the UNDAF that have been sustained by national partners and counterparts, or replicated and scaled up by the Government.</li> <li>● The Government could dedicate resources and prepare a scale-up or replication strategy to increase the potential to maintain UNDAF/UNSDCF benefits over time. The government could create a financing mechanism to help to sustain UN interventions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 13: The UNCT should continue its efforts to reduce transaction costs where possible.</b></p> <p>Medium priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 15</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase joint planning, joint implementation and joint monitoring and reporting to increase efficiency gains.</li> <li>● Enhance the coherence of joint programming such as unified PIUs and delivery mechanism, to reduce transaction costs.</li> <li>● Advance common business operations to ensure greater economy of scale and reduce operations costs, with harmonized common business processes in procurement and common services, with the support of the Operational Management Team (OMT).</li> <li>● Continue to use Harmonized Cash Transfers (HACT) for transferring cash to government and non-governmental partners.</li> <li>● Continue to implement the UN reform efficiency agenda, with the rolling-out of the common back-office initiative.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 14: The UNCT and the Government should contemplate creating an integrated funding framework in the next UNSDCF, and adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda.</b></p> <p>High priority</p> <p><i>Linked to conclusion 16</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create an integrated funding framework in the next UNSDCF, and adequate funding instruments to ensure the scale of impact necessary for attaining the 2030 Agenda.</li> <li>● Identify potential areas for additional resource mobilization, including South-South Cooperation, Public Private Partnerships, and government investment funds.</li> <li>● Include a government financial contribution for the next UNSDCF.</li> <li>● Continue to mobilize funds from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other Thematic Funds.</li> </ul>