PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE: UNEP

United Nations Environment Programme

NOVEMBER 2021

Overview

UNEP is achieving its dual mandates in particular thanks to strong partnerships.

UNEP has a strategically important role in the UN Development System (UNDS), being charged with leading both the UNDS and its 193 member states in addressing "a planetary crisis" and interrelated "climate, biodiversity, and pollution emergencies" urgently and effectively.[1] To achieve this, it is expected to play two major roles:

1. Provide global leadership to implement the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (its normative role):

    –   inform the global community about the main environmental trends and challenges, their causes, and the effectiveness of the responses given so far, and translating this scientific knowledge into policy advice (science-policy interface);

    –   organise intergovernmental environmental fora and facilitating multilateral commitments;

    –   build partnerships to set up or strengthen collective responses to these challenges; and

    –   host the secretariats of several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

2. Provide direct support to public and private stakeholders in developing countries to promote innovative solutions through pilots to support the messages promoted through the above activities (its operational role).

UNEP is delivering this ambitious dual mandate, which has become even more difficult during a global pandemic that has created additional constraints (but also new opportunities for achieving greater climate change mitigation and resilience, and improving environmental sustainability at national and global levels).

Overall, UNEP's multiple strategic and implementing partnerships are coherent, purposeful, and generally effective. They partly help compensate for UNEP's lack of a physical presence in many countries.

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1   As described by UNEP (2021), *For People and Planet: The United Nations Environment Programme strategy for 2022–2025 to tackle climate change, loss of nature and pollution*, https://www.unep.org/resources/ policy-and-strategy/people-and-planet-unep-strategy-2022-2025; and UNEP (2021), *Making Peace With Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies*, https://www.unep. org/resources/making-peace-nature

MOPAN

UNEP regularly produces science-based flagship and other knowledge products. Some are annual, such as the *Emissions Gap, Adaptation Gap* and *Frontiers: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern* reports; while others are more periodic, such as the comprehensive *Global Environmental Outlook* (GEO) report. These and other UNEP documents are intended to inform policy and other environment-related decision making and interventions by the governments of member states and other organisations at the national, regional, and global levels. UNEP's knowledge products are well regarded and support country policy development and advocacy for environmental progress and sustainability. They are widely disseminated and perceived by a broad range of partners as being timely, useful, and of high quality. UNEP also plays an important convening and advocacy role for national environmental authorities at both the regional and global levels and integrates civil society and the private sector into its programmes and activities.

On the operational side, UNEP's programme of works (PoW) and sub-programme results improved significantly between 2016-17 and 2018-19. However, project performance is weaker, especially in terms of efficiency and sustainability.

UNEP'S limited financial and human resources, and limited country presence, require it to engage in a broad range of partnerships and other collaborative arrangements with stakeholders to deliver these results. Overall, UNEP's multiple strategic and implementing partnerships are coherent, purposeful, and generally effective. They partly help compensate for UNEP's lack of physical presence in many countries.

Constraints are being addressed.

UNEP is both a normative and operational organisation, although, over time, it has taken on an increasingly operational role as an implementing agency for the Multilateral Fund for Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the European Commission (EC), and a range of bilateral donors, on which it depends for the bulk of the financial resources with which it operates (approx. 80% of UNEP's resources administered between 2016 and 2019). This results in ambiguities and tensions over the dichotomy between UNEP's normative versus operational roles and activities, including between HQ and some regional offices (ROs).

The change in UNEP's leadership in late 2018 and early 2019, and some re-positioning of management and senior staff, have strengthened the clarity and internal understanding of its strategic direction. In reducing the tensions between the normative and operational roles, positive early signs include the most recent consultative strategic plans and in the equally participatory internal "culture" change process initiated in 2019, as well as the recent implementation of new strategies and policies (e.g., the *Strategy for Private Sector Engagement* in 2019).

Furthermore, the quality of strategic planning that has led to the recently approved medium-term strategy (MTS) for 2022-25 is also a testament to a better aligned and integrated framework, which identifies seven sub-programmes and differentiates "thematic" (climate action, nature action, and chemicals and pollution action), "foundational" (science-policy, and environmental governance), and "enabling" ones (financial and economic transformations and digital transformation). Noteworthy is that the MTS introduces for the first time a clear functional relationship among the organisation's strategic priorities and sub-programmes. It also articulates UNEP's comparative advantage as its capacity to provide up-to-date environment-related scientific knowledge for member states' policies and interventions, and to provide guidance and support for improved environmental governance at the national and global level.

UNEP continues to adjust its operating model as its sub-programmes evolve, and adapts programme and project activities to changing circumstances. Each sub-programme is implemented through a matrix arrangement involving a co-ordinator at HQ and a sub-coordinator in each of the ROs. Changes introduced in 2020 have led to stronger vertical and horizontal co-operation across the organisation, and clearer responsibility for results at division and RO levels. UNEP is making progress implementing the UN Development System reforms, recently strengthening its

participation in the UN multi-agency country diagnostic activities and country Sustainable Development Framework process by nominating RO staff for each country to ensure that relevant environmental considerations are covered.

UNEP's proactive response to COVID-19 during 2020 is a good illustration of its agility and flexibility. It quickly prepared an action plan to help member states respond to the pandemic in the short term (e.g. guidance on managing medical and hazardous waste) and to seek potential longer-term opportunities, including "building back greener". In July 2020, in collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), UNEP published *Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission*. It also adapted its project implementation requirements and timelines and adopted virtual working both internally and with external stakeholders.

Finally, UNEP's systems are increasingly geared towards managing and accounting for results. There is greater attention given to incorporating lessons learned from prior experience and programme, sub-programme, and project evaluation recommendations into its evolving MTSs, PoWs, and project designs. Other encouraging developments are the clear initiatives and planning for improvements in managing for results. For example, future programme and sub-programme performance assessments will capture the results of UNEP's actions at three distinct levels: its direct support, the results enabled by it, and the results it influenced. It is also increasing the emphasis on its normative outputs and roles, ensuring that all new projects for which it is the implementing agency fully reflect its normative role, which was not the case previously.

However, this is work in progress and challenges remain.

UNEP remains challenged by the overall size and limited flexibility of its resource base. While donors provide the bulk of its total resources to finance specific operations on the ground, its non-earmarked financing comes predominantly from the Environment Fund (EF), composed of voluntary contributions from member states, which has had uneven and, in some cases, declining resource increments during the assessment period. The organisation's core UN budget has also remained largely unchanged in the same period. UNEP continues to seek flexible funding from its member states and other key stakeholders, in particular through the EF.

While the reliance on earmarked funds from key donors is positive, as projects are designed together with governments and key stakeholders, it has strategic and operational implications.

It is not always easy for UNEP to align the use of donor resources with its priorities. The project design quality review process requires that each new project design includes a statement as to how it will contribute to the current PoW, however, the extent of this alignment depends on the priorities of beneficiary countries and donors. In practice, the sub-programmes which are responsible for many of UNEP's normative outputs are also among those which receive the lowest funding.

Design varies across projects and areas for improvement remain. Each project is reviewed for its alignment with the new Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF) but limited human resource capacity means this is not applied with equal rigour across all projects. Project designs generally integrate gender aspects but there are no requirements directly related to human rights. Project design documents contain statements on the sustainability of results, but proactive planning for long-term sustainability of project results is not required and monitoring of their sustainability is limited due to timing and resource constraints. Tools exist for designing interventions based on contextual and situational analysis, but are not standardised across projects financed by different donors. Capacity is not assessed systematically or in a standardised manner across projects. While there are detailed risk identification and management strategies in project design documents, particularly safeguards requirements, they are not consistent in detailing all categories of risk. While UNEP has standards in place for implementing partners to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, it is unable to ensure this through independent on-the-ground verification of individual projects.

From the results management perspective, projects vary greatly in monitoring and evaluating, and in their integration into planning for interventions, as these depend on donor requirements and funding arrangements. Also, current funding tends to favour project evaluations to the detriment of assessing sub-programmes and broader initiatives that may provide richer learning opportunities for the organisation. Finally, results-based budgeting and costing the intended sub-programme outcomes in PoWs still need more work.

Big picture and looking ahead

UNEP's role is pivotal in the global response to growing environmental challenges and it is aware of the need to augment and diversify its resources if it is to rise to meet these challenges and the demands from its member states and other stakeholders. UNEP is also conscious of the performance areas and sub-areas that require further strengthening based on the 2019 OIOS evaluation, its own assessments, internal and external "discovery sessions," and deliberations over the past two years. It has explicitly identified most of them in the new MTS and PoW, including some not specifically addressed in the present exercise. These include the need for stronger collaboration with the MEAs, which UNEP has now formally pledged to do in the years immediately ahead.

Increasing demands from UNEP's member states and other stakeholders will be a key challenge in the coming years, requiring it to use its limited human and financial resources in the most efficient and cost-effective way. This is regardless of whether resources can be successfully increased and diversified in the next few years. Sustaining and advancing UNEP's current positive trajectory will thus depend not only on the organisation itself, but also on its member states and donors, equipping it with the resources it needs to address the environmental issues that require enhanced global leadership. The magnitude and interconnectedness of global environmental challenges mean that UNEP's resources will always be limited – its task is therefore to use these resources strategically and efficiently to achieve its ambitious objectives and priorities.

Clarifying UNEP's operating model to delineate the links between its donor-funded projects and broader normative mandates and activities in its evolving corporate strategic planning documents could affect the future trajectory positively. To help resolve the ambiguities and tensions between its normative and operational roles, UNEP could further clarify how the actions and intended "outcomes" identified in its strategic planning documents are translated into donor-financed projects on the ground. It could also clarify how these projects, which individually and collectively operationalise the strategic plans, support UNEP's normative role.

The final challenge would be to clearly identify the results of UNEP's direct actions and outputs, both for the UN system and its member states. These include the results of (i) its normative, information, and advocacy activities; (ii) its environmental policy and governance advice; (iii) its associated knowledge products; and (iv) the knowledge products of the donor-funded projects for which it serves as the implementing agency. Doing so might also help resolve the apparent disconnect between its reported results at the PoW and project levels. This suggests the need to shift the focus of its evaluation efforts to give less emphasis to donor-required project-level assessments and greater attention to its other initiatives and types of activity.
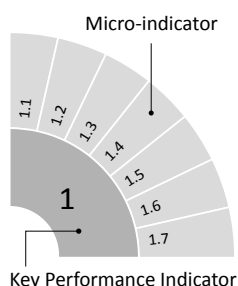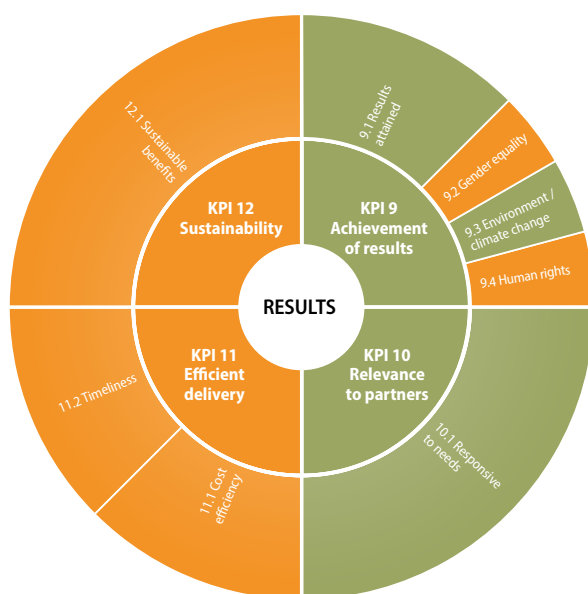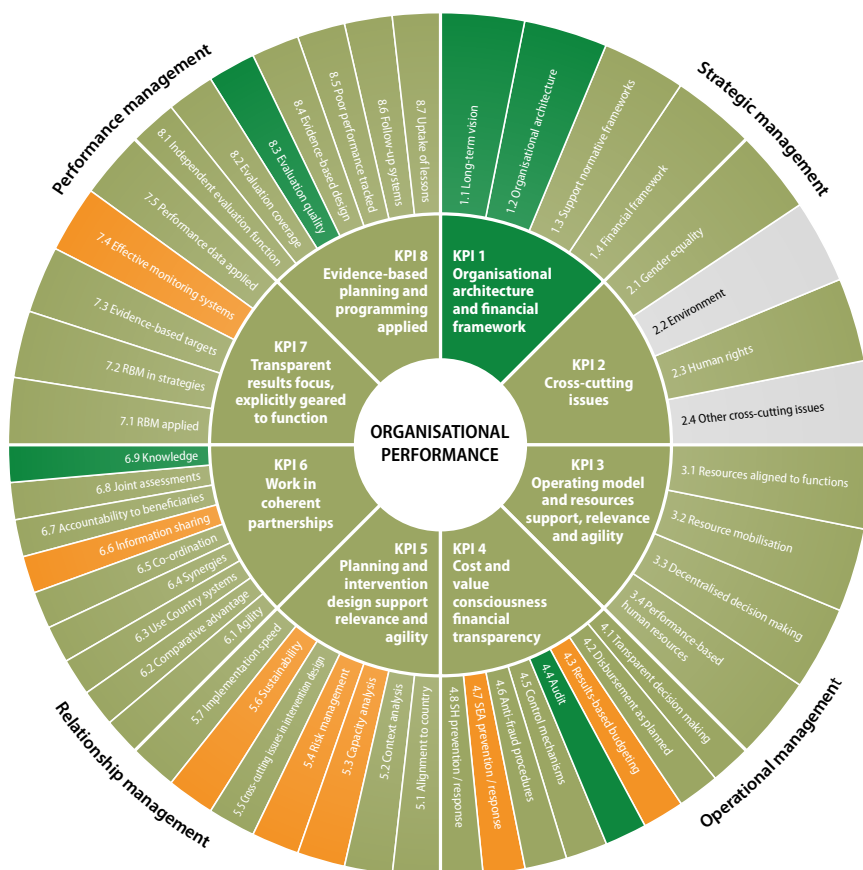
Strengths and areas for improvement

Main strengths

- Organisational architecture and operating model are supportive of the broader mandate.
  - Institution is guided and overseen by a periodic assembly (UNEA), consisting of 193 member states, and its Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR).
  - UNEP possesses competent and dedicated managers and staff.
  - Strategic plans are based on a long-term vision and align with the corporate mission and mandate as well as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
  - Projects and strategic plans are adaptable and adjustable based on consultation with and participation of external stakeholders.
  - Wide varieties of collaborative arrangements and partnerships exist based on comparative advantage.

- Newly revised policies and frameworks appear to be strengthening the organisation across the performance areas.
  - UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework, Resource Mobilisation Strategy, Partnership Policy and Procedures, Delegation of Authority Policy and Framework, and Anti-fraud and Anti-corruption Guidelines, and other key policies and guidance documents, have been updated and revised during the current assessment period.
  - The first Strategy for Private Sector Engagement was issued in 2019, and application of this strategy has begun.
  - UNEP is successfully applying the UNDS reforms.
  - Organisational response to COVID-19 demonstrates adaptive management and substantive relevance.
  - Knowledge products are perceived as timely, useful, and of good quality, and are appreciated by partners and other stakeholders.
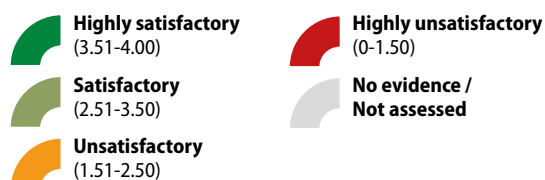
Areas for improvement

- Operational versus normative role is not clearly understood or universally implemented across the organisation.
  - Senior management is clear on UNEP's overarching normative nature, but application across the organisation is not universally observed.
  - Continued reliance on donor funding influences project selection and complicates an internal and external understanding, and appreciation of, the normative versus operational roles and thus UNEP's ability to deliver on its broader mandate.

- Results-based management remains a work in progress.
  - Improvements to results-based budgeting continue, despite the constraints of the current UN cost accounting systems.
  - Sub-programme results indicators and targets could be more outcome-oriented and clearly and explicitly linked to those at the contributing project level.

- Resource structures to support operations and organisational effectiveness.
  - UNEP's ability to deliver its PoW based on approved strategies and its comparative advantages could be strengthened through an increase in its unrestricted financial resources and greater internal control over budget allocation and use.
  - Resources for evaluation could be increased and made less dependent on donor-funded project budgets, allowing greater capacity to focus on sub-programme and special initiative performance and results, whose lessons may be more useful.

- Project-level monitoring, oversight, efficiency, and replicability.
  - Up-front analysis of institutional capacity, reputational risk, and sustainability could strengthen project design and initial quality.
  - Monitoring and oversight of implementation could be improved, including of the newly revised Environmental Social Sustainability Framework.
  - Poor recent project evaluation results show that effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability need to be improved.
  - Ex-post evaluation of project success factors, scale-up, and replicability could be enhanced and an assessment added of the performance of the executing agency or agencies and of UNEP itself as the implementing agency.

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PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY FOR UNEP

Performance management

8.1 Independent evaluation function
8.2 Evaluation coverage
8.3 Evaluation quality
8.4 Evidence-based design
8.5 Poor performance tracked
8.6 Follow-up systems
8.7 Uptake of lessons

Strategic management

1.1 Long-term vision
1.2 Organisational architecture
1.3 Support normative frameworks
1.4 Financial framework
2.1 Gender equality
2.2 Environment
2.3 Human rights
2.4 Other cross-cutting issues

7.5 Performance data applied
7.4 Effective monitoring systems
7.3 Evidence-based targets
7.2 RBM in strategies
7.1 RBM applied
6.9 Knowledge
6.8 Joint assessments
6.7 Accountability to beneficiaries
6.6 Information sharing
6.5 Co-ordination
6.4 Synergies
6.3 Use Country systems
6.2 Comparative advantage
6.1 Agility

KPI 8 Evidence-based planning and programming applied
KPI 7 Transparent results focus, explicitly geared to function
KPI 6 Work in coherent partnerships
KPI 5 Planning and intervention design support relevance and agility
KPI 1 Organisational architecture and financial framework
KPI 2 Cross-cutting issues
KPI 3 Operating model and resources support, relevance and agility
KPI 4 Cost and value consciousness financial transparency

ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

3.1 Resources aligned to functions
3.2 Resource mobilisation
3.3 Decentralised decision making
3.4 Performance-based human resources
4.1 Transparent decision making
4.2 Disbursement as planned
4.3 Results-based budgeting
4.4 Audit
4.5 Control mechanisms
4.6 Anti-fraud procedures
4.7 SEA prevention / response
4.8 SH prevention / response

5.7 Implementation speed
5.6 Sustainability
5.5 Cross-cutting issues in intervention design
5.4 Risk management
5.3 Capacity analysis
5.2 Context analysis
5.1 Alignment to country

Relationship management

Operational management

RESULTS

12.1 Sustainable benefits
KPI 12 Sustainability
KPI 11 Efficient delivery
11.2 Timeliness
11.1 Cost efficiency
KPI 10 Relevance to partners
10.1 Responsive to needs
KPI 9 Achievement of results
9.1 Results attained
9.2 Gender equality
9.3 Environment / climate change
9.4 Human rights

Micro-indicator

1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 1.5 1.6 1.7

1

Key Performance Indicator

How to read these charts

Highly satisfactory (3.51-4.00)

Satisfactory (2.51-3.50)

Unsatisfactory (1.51-2.50)

Highly unsatisfactory (0-1.50)

No evidence / Not assessed

MISSION AND MANDATE:

UNEP's mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and their citizens to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. UNEP has the dual mandate to promote international co-operation in the environment field and to co-ordinate environmental matters within the UN system.

GOVERNANCE:

Since mid-2014 UNEP has been governed by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), composed of representatives of all 193 member states, which replaced the earlier governing council. UNEP's open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) represents UNEA between its biennial meetings. The CPR, which consists of all accredited permanent representatives to UNEP and meets at least four times a year, prepares the UNEA meetings and regularly reviews the implementation of its decisions.

STRUCTURE:

The executive office at UNEP Headquarters (HQ) in Nairobi is responsible for operations. UNEP currently works through seven HQ divisions, six regional offices, five sub-regional offices, six country offices, and three liaison offices. It had 1 266 total staff in 2020. Its matrix structure includes seven cross-cutting sub-programmes. UNEP has a network of collaborating centres of excellence and hosts the secretariats or co-ordination units of numerous Multilateral Environment Agreements.

FINANCE:

UNEP's estimated budget for 2020-21 is USD 917.1 million, from five sources:
(i) UN regular budget;
(ii) Environment Fund;
(iii) global funds;
(iv) other donor-provided earmarked resources; and
(v) Programme support funds.

Key findings by performance area

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF UNEP

UNEP's strategic direction continues to evolve and improve over time. This was recognised in the previous MOPAN assessment, which compared the MTS for 2018-21 with its predecessor (2014-17). This process has advanced further with the recently approved MTS for 2022-25, which differentiates sub-programmes according to whether they are "thematic" (climate action, nature action, and chemicals and pollution action), "foundational" (science-policy, and environmental governance), and "enabling" (financial and economic transformations and digital transformation, the latter being completely new). The new MTS also highlights the functional relationships among sub-programmes, which was not the case in the past. There is now greater focus and indication of relative priorities. However, this can be challenged by requests from member states through UNEA, if not well aligned to the MTS.
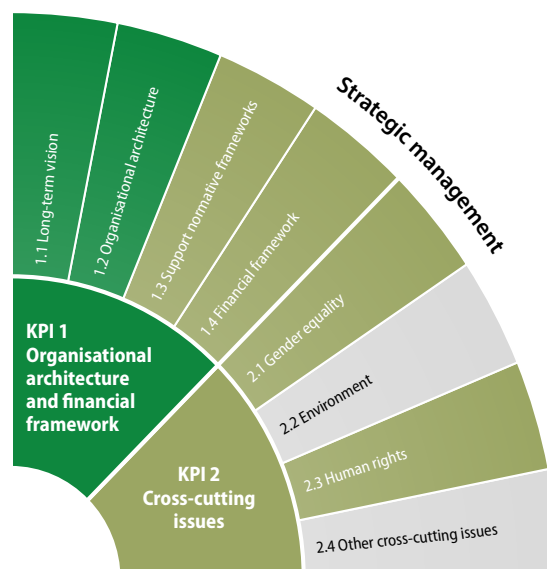
The new MTS articulates UNEP's comparative advantage as its capacity to provide up-to-date environment-related scientific knowledge for member states' policies and interventions, and to provide guidance and support for improved environmental governance at the national and global level. UNEP's organisational architecture was adjusted during the assessment period to better support for implementation of strategic plans. Nevertheless, the financial framework is still constraining due to its heavy reliance on earmarked donor funding. This reduces UNEP's flexibility to allocate resources and may perpetuate ambiguities over the relative importance and relationship between its normative and operational roles.

UNEP seeks to integrate the cross-cutting issues of gender equality, women's empowerment, and human rights (as UNEP's core activities are cross-cutting by nature, environment is not considered separately from its overall performance in this report). Strong attention to gender balance is clearly reflected in its own internal leadership, management, and staffing. However, UNEP has made greater progress in achieving a gender balance internally than in the results of its projects. This shortcoming was evident both in strategic documents and during interviews. The organisation has emphasised that environmental rights are human rights, highlighting the need to protect environmental defenders. However, less attention is given to this concern in its operations despite its acknowledged importance. Both gender equality and human rights could be strengthened at both strategic and project levels.

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF UNEP

UNEP's assets and capacities are well aligned with the strategic directions established in its MTS and associated PoWs. Existing mechanisms ensure continuing relevance, agility, and accountability. However, UNEP remains highly dependent on earmarked funds from key donors, particularly GEF and GCF. This can also be characterised as a working modality as GEF, GCF, EC projects are designed together with governments and key stakeholders. At least half of GEF, GCF, and EC projects are developed at the request of governments, in line with country policies, and are also aligned with UNEP's MTSs and PoWs. Projects are executed by country and other local partners where UNEP is the implementing agency. UNEP attempts to ensure that new projects are consistent with the current MTS and PoW through a project quality design review process. UNEP's overall financial and human resources – and its country presence – remain limited. It is seeking to increase the financial resources

for the EF, as these allow it greater freedom in its substantive work. This fund ultimately depends on the level of voluntary contributions from member states and other partners, including the private sector. Despite some recent success in obtaining "soft earmarking" for the use of financial resources from a few bilateral donors and increasing private sector contributions, voluntary contributions from member states continue to be limited and variable.

UNEP modifies its operating model as its sub-programmes evolve over time and adapts its activities to changing external circumstances, both at the programme and project level. Its proactive response to COVID-19 at both levels during 2020 provides a good illustration of its agility and flexibility. While there are areas in which accountability can be improved, there has been progress as UNEP strives to further strengthen the organisation's results focus and associated management practices. UNEP is also seeking to strengthen its ability to carry out its normative role and align the design of its operations more closely with the priorities associated with this role[2]. UNEP is making the donor-funded projects for which it is the implementing agency more efficient and effective and their results more sustainable. At the same time, it is reviewing both the number and scope of its knowledge products to ensure their continued relevance and quality. UNEP's performance on cost and value consciousness and financial transparency is good, although it could be strengthened at the sub-programme level. It also has measures in place to prevent and address fraud, corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH) risks in accordance with the policies and guidance issued by the UN Secretariat. While there has been an effort to consolidate some functions or separate some responsibilities, UNEP depends significantly on the actions of other UN entities, especially the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON) for training and OIOS for investigations into SEA and SH allegations.

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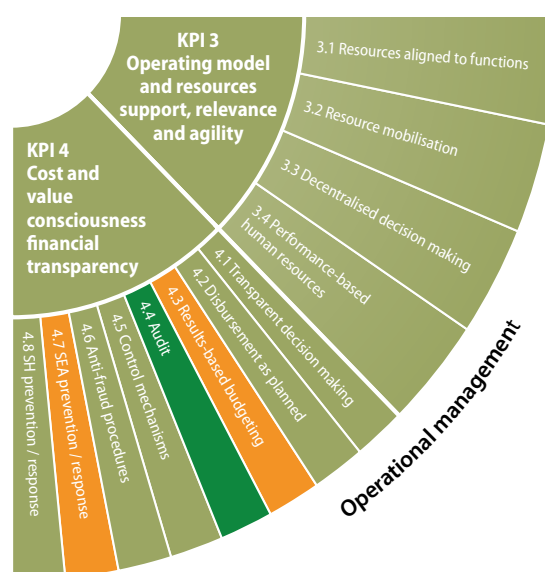
2   UNEP ensures that all new projects for which it is the implementing agency are now fully consistent with its normative role, which was not the case previously.
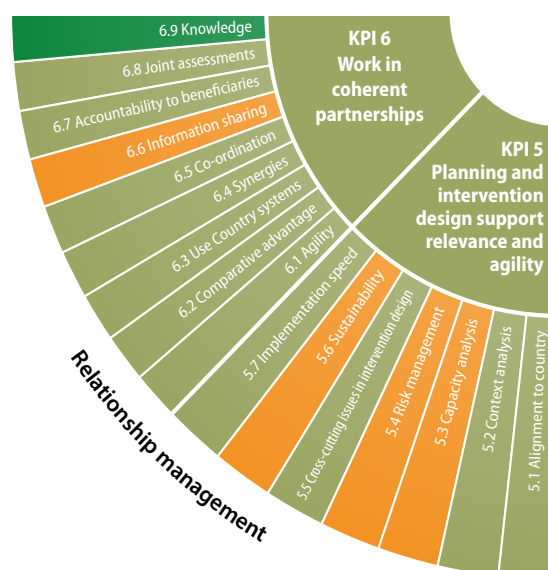
RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT OF UNEP

UNEP's operating model relies on a broad range of country and other partners for its resources and for executing the projects where it is the implementing agency. This enhances and sustains its relevance and ability to leverage effective solutions for environmental issues and challenges, while strengthening its capacity to maximise the results of the interventions it supports. UNEP's partnerships are critical to its ability to produce knowledge products and support pilot, capacity-building, and other interventions on the ground. They support UNEP in providing advice to its member states on environmental policies and actions by drawing on current and consolidated scientific knowledge on the growing global and local environmental challenges.

UNEP has a range of partnerships and other collaborative arrangements with stakeholders. These include key donors, national governments, other UN entities, academic and scientific research institutions, NGOs, financial intermediaries, and the private sector. They are based on each partner's comparative advantage, and are formalised mainly through specific partnership co-operation agreements (PCAs) and memoranda of understanding. At the project level they are structured through specific legal agreements, such as non-financial legal agreements (e.g., memoranda of understanding) or financial agreements (e.g., small-scale funding agreements and project agreements. UNEP's partners are screened and subjected to an up-front risk assessment, as set out in its 2011 Partnership Policy and Procedures document, revised and updated in late 2019[3]. UNEP also issued its first Private Sector Engagement Strategy in October 2019. Executing partners at the country level are actively involved in project preparation as well as implementation, including helping to undertake contextual and situational analysis, capacity analysis, risk identification and mitigation, integration of cross-cutting issues such as gender and human rights, and definition of measures to promote sustainability. However, several of these areas would benefit from strengthening based on evaluation results.

UNEP's partnerships are important for leveraging and catalysing financial and knowledge resources. They can be used to mobilise co-financing for project implementation from governments, other domestic counterpart resources, GEF, GCF, EC, and other donors. UNEP is also committed to supporting South-South and triangular co-operation and knowledge exchange among countries, including through multi-country operations and the production and dissemination of key knowledge products. Developing these products involves strong collaboration with scientific and other experts, including editors, authors, and peer reviewers associated with a wide variety of institutions in both developed and developed countries. Some of these documents are annual, such as the climate change-related Emissions Gap, Adaptation Gap and the Frontiers: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concerns reports. Others are more periodic, such as the flagship Global Environmental Outlook reports, the most recent being GEO-6[4], published in 2019. These reports are designed to inform national policy and decision makers, as well as the general public.
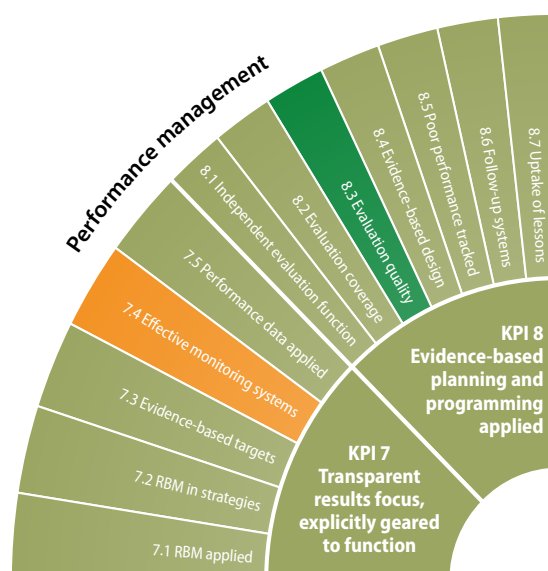
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3   This policy is nearing the end of a pilot implementation phase and expected to go into effect by the end of 2021

4   See https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF UNEP

UNEP's systems are increasingly geared towards managing and accounting for results. UNEP has increased its results focus over time and seeks to strengthen RBM and budgeting, including during the present assessment period. There is greater attention given to incorporating lessons learned from prior experience and programme, sub-programme, and project evaluation recommendations into its evolving MTSs, PoWs, and project designs. However, this remains a work in progress, especially for results-based budgeting and costing intended sub-programme outcomes in PoWs. UNEP reviews performance-related information on a quarterly, annual, and biannual basis and uses this information to make adjustments while implementing sub-programmes and projects. Monitoring and reporting by executing partners at the project level remains weak, however, and could be strengthened.

Performance management

8.1 Independent evaluation function
8.2 Evaluation coverage
8.3 Evaluation quality
8.4 Evidence-based design
8.5 Poor performance tracked
8.6 Follow-up systems
8.7 Uptake of lessons

7.1 RBM applied
7.2 RBM in strategies
7.3 Evidence-based targets
7.4 Effective monitoring systems
7.5 Performance data applied

KPI 8 Evidence-based planning and programming applied

KPI 7 Transparent results focus, explicitly geared to function

UNEP's evaluation function is largely independent, although the Evaluation Office reports to the ED and not directly to UNEA –a limit set by UNEP's governance arrangements. Moreover, the Evaluation Office relies significantly on donor-financed project budgets and fees, rather than core funding, for its project level mid-term and terminal evaluations. It would be useful for CPR/UNEA to review the adequacy of this office's resources, as well as its financial independence.. UNEP evaluations are carried out by experienced consultants and are of good quality. Internal mechanisms and incentives exist for ensuring evaluation lessons and recommendations inform new strategic plans and projects. These mechanisms and incentives have received renewed support from UNEP's leadership, which values the evaluation function and the evidence-based planning it promotes. In practice, despite the relatively lower share of resources spent, evaluation feedback appears to have more influence on programme and sub-programme planning than on new project design. This is largely due to a combination of timing and substantive constraints as sometimes evaluation reports become available too late in the project preparation process or are not of direct relevance to the new project design. Evaluations could give greater attention to whether the projects for which UNEP is the implementing agency and that are intended to "pilot" innovative approaches are the right vehicles. In addition, when projects are successful, evaluations might be more helpful if they also seek to determine the extent to which the approaches they embody are being scaled up and replicated elsewhere.

UNEP ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

UNEP reports improved results over time but there remains a disconnect between programme and project-level outcomes. The programme and sub-programme results reported during the assessment period achieved much higher satisfactory ratings than the projects which largely implement these broader initiatives. UNEP's PoW and sub-programme results[5] improved significantly between 2016-17 and 2018-19, which UNEP attributes at least in part to more realistic initial target setting for the more recent PoW. However, project performance is weaker, as summarised every two years in the Evaluation Synthesis Reports (ESRs).[6] This is especially the case for criteria such as efficiency and sustainability, which are not specifically assessed in the Programme Performance Report (PPRs), as well as effectiveness. As UNEP's sub-programmes are reportedly implemented through projects, this apparent "disconnect" is puzzling and requires clarification but might be explained by the fact that different methodologies are used to assess overall programme, sub-programme and individual project

performance. Although the Evaluation Office periodically assesses sub-programmes as well as projects, only two sub-programme evaluations were issued during this assessment period. Most of the donor-funded projects that were evaluated over the period were associated with climate change, ecosystems, and chemicals and pollution sub-programmes, none of which were evaluated by this office. The efficiency and sustainability of the projects for which UNEP is the implementing agency require greater attention. Project efficiency, for instance, is assessed by UNEP primarily in terms of timeliness of implementation rather than cost-effectiveness. Low project sustainability ratings in turn clearly suggest the need for substantial strengthening of the associated financial and institutional preconditions. The achievements of the PoW and sub-programmes would benefit from greater ex-post assessment.

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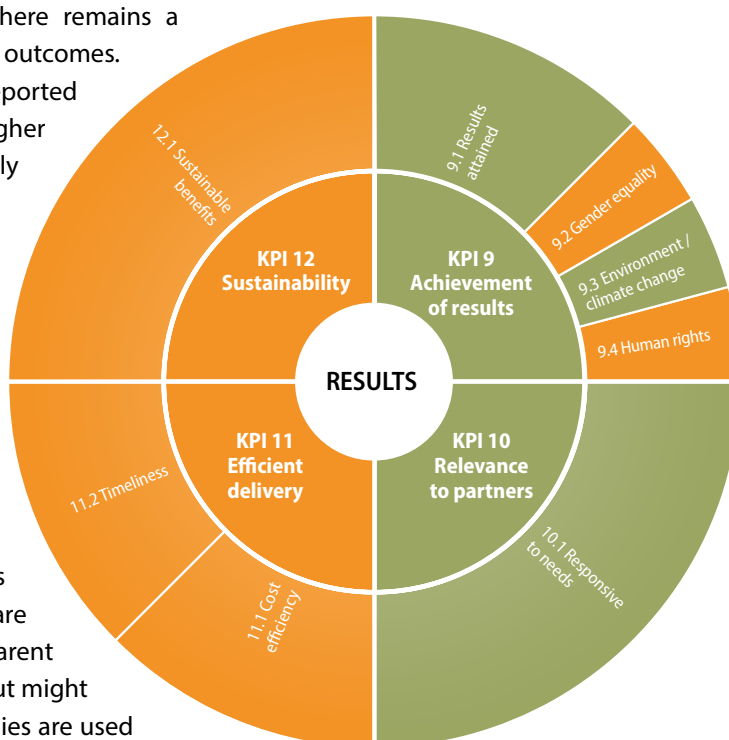
5   As reported in its annual and biannual PPRs.

6   Prepared by the UNEP Evaluation Office.

About this assessment

This is the third MOPAN UNEP assessment, and covers the period from mid-2016 to the end of 2020.[7] It was championed by Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland on behalf of the Network. The assessment relies on three lines of evidence (see box). The survey was sent to seven groups of UNEP partners in February and March 2021: representatives of UNEP's governing body (i.e., UNEA), donors, governments, other UN agencies and international financial institutions, NGOs, the private sector, and academic and research institutions, including a focus on 15 selected countries of operations.[8]

Lines of evidence
- About 200 documentary sources
- Interviews with 41 staff
- Survey of 1 077 partners with 334 responses – a 31.2% response rate

3.1 METHODOLOGY APPLIED IN THIS ASSESSMENT

The MOPAN 3.1 methodology employed in this assessment uses a framework of 12 key performance indicators (KPIs) and associated micro-indicators (MIs). It comprises standards that characterise an effective multilateral organisation. As part of MOPAN's efforts to ensure its assessments remain relevant to stakeholders and aligned to international best practice, the MOPAN methodology is always evolving. More details are available in MOPAN's 3.1 methodology manual.[9]

The only adaptation made to the MOPAN 3.1 assessment framework for UNEP's review was not to consider environmental sustainability and climate change as a separate cross-cutting issue for KPI 2 because UNEP's core mission is precisely to promote environmental sustainability, including effective responses to climate change, within the UN system and among its member states. Further information about the application of the MOPAN methodology to UNEP is available in Chapter 4 of the full report.

About MOPAN

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is a network of 21 countries[10] that share a common interest in assessing the effectiveness of the major multilateral organisations they fund, including UN agencies, international financial institutions and global funds.

The Network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of the organisations it assesses. This knowledge base contributes to organisational learning among the organisations, their direct clients and partners, and other stakeholders. Network members and other stakeholders use the reports for their own accountability needs and as a source of input for strategic decision making.

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7   Though evidence from outside this range may have been used

8   The survey was sent to 15 middle- and lower-income countries in different regions, although some partners from other countries responded as well. These countries were: Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, People's Republic of China, Peru, Philippines, and South Africa.

9   Available at www.mopanonline.org.

10 As at 1 October 2021: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States; the European Union and Qatar as observers.