



UNITED NATIONS  
CAMBODIA



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# BRIEF - EVALUATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK (2019-2023) IN CAMBODIA



## OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- To assess **the contribution of the UNDAF** to national development results through evidence-based judgments using evaluation criteria.
- To identify **factors** that have affected the UNDAF's contribution; why the performance is as it is; and explaining the enabling factors and bottlenecks.
- To assess the **sustainability** of the UN system support.
- To provide clear and actionable **recommendations** for improving the UN system's contribution to national development priorities, especially for incorporating into the new UNSDCF.

## SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation covered all UN Development System, funds and programmes (resident and non-resident) conducted in Cambodia from January 2019 to March 2022, across 5 outcomes and 15 intermediate outcomes. It also covered the programming principles of human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, Leaving No One Behind (LNOB), disability inclusion, sustainability, resilience and accountability. The five interrelated outcomes that the UNDAF is built around are as follows:



The evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner in accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) 2021 Guidelines. The evaluation team used a mixed-methods approach drawing on desk review, key informant interviews, stakeholder workshops and a structured questionnaire, with information triangulated between these sources.

#### Ethical considerations

- Adherence to the UNEG Norms and Standards (2016) and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines (2020).
- Gender sensitive and responsive process ensuring confidentiality.

#### Data collection and analysis

- Desk review, semi-structured interviews, questionnaire.
- 15 days mission in Cambodia (capital and province).
- Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data and sources among team members.
- Stakeholders' meetings to validate the initial findings and discuss recommendations.



#### Programmatic approach

- Drawing from evaluation reports/mid-term reviews of the UN agencies, funds and programmes.
- Technical Meeting to discuss the Theory of Change and assess formulation and activities.

#### Participatory design

- Involving UN agencies, government officials, CSOs, private sector, academia and development partners, identified through stakeholders' mapping and consultation.
- Final sample of 133 stakeholders at the national level, 30 at the sub-national to ensure diversity.

## FINDINGS / CONCLUSIONS

### RELEVANCE AND ADAPTABILITY

- **The UNDAF strategic priorities were well aligned with the main national policies and priorities:** the National Strategic Development Plan (2019-2023) and the Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) 2016-2030.
- **The UNCT has been very resilient, responsive and strategic in its implementation of the UNDAF,** addressing emerging and emergency needs, including with the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected especially the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- The UNCT developed the Socio-Economic Response Framework (SERF) to respond to the pandemic and repurpose some resources and interventions in a collaborative and coordinated manner to support the most disadvantaged population.

### EFFECTIVENESS

- The contributions of UN agencies, particularly through technical assistance, have remained fundamental in facilitating progress towards national objectives and CSDGs. **There is progress across all five UNDAF outcomes.**
- The country's resilience and speed of recovery from the pandemic is partly attributable to the strategic coordination, facilitation and service delivery provided in cooperation with national institutions and development partners.
- **Implementation of the UNDAF has contributed to major institutional and legislative changes,** across virtually all areas of development, targeting the most vulnerable and remote populations.



- **UN agencies work has minimized the disruption** in access to health/education services and sustained livelihoods through aiding management of the health response and policies to support individuals and the economy, and facilitation of recovery.
- UN agencies have contributed to strategic thinking on increased competitiveness, innovation and a green, inclusive economy, but its role remains small compared to needs in these sectors.
- Concerted efforts between the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and other partners is needed to sustain growth and a resilient economy, along with the integration of industrial, agriculture, environment and climate change, and sustainable urban development.
- Further support is needed for the implementation of legal and strategic frameworks, including at the subnational level.
- Effectiveness has been undermined by a shortfall in funding, in particular in areas such as urbanisation and access to services, and a concentration of resources in COVID-19-centred interventions.
- **Limited funding and competing agency priorities has hampered a systematic and integrated approach to development.**
- The UN agencies were able to **leverage government and non-government capacities** to pursue development initiatives across multiple areas, ranging from social protection, economic inclusion and environmental sustainability. The United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) has played an effective role, in leveraging leadership and the diverse expertise of the UN, and fostering strategic partnerships with development partners.
- The UNDAF does not have an **explicit financing or resource mobilization strategy**, and an **integrated funding framework** has not been established, which has limited incentives for joint programming, and the potential to leverage work under joint programmes to maximise outcomes.

## **COHERENCE**

- The UNCT and UNRC **collaborated with the Government, international organizations, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector.** However, the evaluation identified **gaps and difficulties** in relation to the strategic and coordinated engagement with these partners. For example, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) believe that **UN agencies do not properly support them**, particularly when they tackle important issues like human rights.
- **Strengthened long-term partnerships with stakeholders** would enhance the UNDAF's coherence.

## **EFFICIENCY**

- **The UNCT prioritized activities based on the needs rather than on the availability of resources**, and reallocated resources according to the collective priorities and changing needs.



## **COORDINATION**

- The **work performed by the Results Groups is demanding and lacks additional resources**, limiting the ambitions of the UN reform.
- UN agencies have strengthened their coordination through 11 Joint Programmes (JP), which is a significant improvement with respect to the previous two UNDAF cycles. However, these JPs are rather resource-driven, taking advantage of funding opportunities.
- While more evidence would be needed regarding the connectedness within JPs, cooperation and synergy between agencies is sometimes limited.
- The UNDAF **coordination structure did not contribute much to ensure ownership and engagement by national counterparts**. The engagement with the government was mainly undertaken at the Resident Coordinator level, and less at Result Groups' level.
- A **collective engagement** on the UNDAF between the government and the UNCT is required under the reform process.
- The **alignment of the UNDAF strategic priorities with national objectives** and the continuous harmonization at the higher policy/sectoral levels ensure some Government ownership and investment in desired outcomes, which are key prerequisites for sustainability. However, innovation and change often require time and resources and sustainability prospects increase where the 4 UN's interventions are scaled up over more than one UNDAF cycle and where the sector's vision and capacities are more mature.
- The UNCT should **intensify its convening and capacitating role** for rights-holders and their representatives to ensure a critical mass of demand for civic space and accountability.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH**

- The UNCT has used the UNDAF to contribute to the mainstreaming of the programming principle on the Human Rights-Based Approach.
- A significant body of work has been undertaken, with the UNCT Human Rights Strategy, namely: i) the 2021 UNCT Retreat on Human Rights in the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic, ii) the Human Rights Markers, data and indicators, iii) the follow-up to the key observations and recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review and human rights mechanisms.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

- UN agencies development of long-standing strategic partnership and the trusting relationship with the government are important enabling factors to generate meaningful change through the UNDAF.



- The **Human Rights Theme Group**, however, **did not regularly liaise with the RGs and did not frequently report to the UNCT** on progress on mainstreaming HRBA in UNDAF implementation.

## **GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

- The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) principle was proactively mainstreamed through the UNDAF implementation, supported by a number of key exercises, such as the Gender Equality Scorecard Exercise, which found 45.5 percent of indicators to be gender sensitive, and monitored the advancement of GEWE. Three of the six Joint Programmes (existing at the time of the Scorecard) clearly mainstreamed gender and now, there is now a JP on credit guarantees for women's enterprises.
- The **UNCT encouraged the participation of CSOs and women's rights advocates** in the implementation of the UNDAF, in particular: joint initiatives, the CCA process, high-level visits and events, awareness raising campaigns, and UN agencies' programmes.
- However, the **GTG lacks dedicated financial resources** to carry out its yearly work plan, and is reliant on agencies' in-kind contributions, the majority of which are supported by the RCO.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

-  **Recommendation 1:** The UNCT and Government should **ensure that the next UNSDCF is based on the new guidelines** for developing a Cooperation Framework to improve the design, conception and usefulness of the instrument to capture a shared vision and mission in the context of the SDGs.
-  **Recommendation 2:** The UNCT should **encourage and enhance Government participation in the strategic management** of the next UNSDCF.
-  **Recommendation 3:** The UNCT should **develop partnership strategies** to more effectively engage CSOs, the private sector, academia and development partners to encourage more deliberate and systematic engagement with these actors to enhance UNSDCF effectiveness.
-  **Recommendation 4:** The UNCT should **capitalize on the comparative expertise and resources of implementing UN Agencies** to strengthen joint programming, reduce duplication of efforts, and implement targeted joint programmes, to reach higher level results.
-  **Recommendation 5:** The UNCT should **strengthen its strategic positioning** through the next UNSDCF by pursuing the efforts made on strategic thinking and designing the UNSDCF in a manner that facilitates integration across sectors.
-  **Recommendation 6:** UN agencies should **increase their cooperation through the Results and Theme Groups** and use them to help the UNCT to strategically manage the UNSDCF, with the RC/UNCT leadership.
-  **Recommendation 7:** The UNCT, under the leadership of the RC, should **ensure greater mainstreaming of the UNSDCF guiding principles on Leave No One Behind and the Human Rights-Based Approach**.
-  **Recommendation 8:** The UNCT, under leadership of the RC, should **ensure a greater mainstreaming of the UNSDCF guiding principle on gender equality and women's empowerment**.
-  **Recommendation 9:** 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.

