

UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office

System-wide Evaluation on progress towards a new generation of United Nations Country Teams

Country Programme derivation from and alignment with UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and UN Country Team configuration

Summary Terms of Reference - October 2024 update



Background & purpose

The **United Nations development system reform** calls for more coherent, accountable, and effective support to help Member States achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Driven by the vision and proposals of the UN Secretary-General, the reform was mandated by the General Assembly (GA) in 2018 and includes a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) System and a new generation of UN Country Teams (UNCT) delivering shared results in response to national development needs and priorities.

In this context, GA Resolutions 72/279 and 75/233 have recognised **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks** as the “most important instrument for the planning and implementation of UN development activities in each country”. Accordingly, the Cooperation Framework guidance (2019) emphasises that “UN entities derive country programme outcomes from the Cooperation Framework, not vice-versa. Outcomes are hence developed in parallel to, not ahead of, the Cooperation Framework.”

Measures to ensure and certify the **derivation** and **alignment** of UN country programmes with the Cooperation Framework are specified in the 2019 guidance and the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF). UNCT **configuration** is connected to derivation and alignment and concerns the skills and capacities of the UN entities to deliver on the priorities of the Cooperation Framework.

UNSDG Principals have requested “**an independent system-wide evaluation** on good practices and opportunities for improvement on country programmes derivation from, and alignment with, Cooperation Frameworks and UN country team configuration”. The proposed evaluation has also been welcomed by the Secretary-General in his reports on the implementation of the QCPR, with the 2024 report noting that “it will provide an important basis for the UN Sustainable Development Group to consider the system changes that may be required to ensure UNCT programmes and priorities are substantively derived from the priorities agreed with Member States in the Cooperation Framework.”

The Cooperation Framework guidance has now been implemented in more than 100 programme countries and many second-generation Cooperation Frameworks are due to be designed in the coming years.

Objectives & users

The evaluation has a dual purpose of accountability and learning, with a particular focus on learning lessons from the first generation of Cooperation Frameworks, identifying good practices and opportunities for improvement. It is timed to draw lessons from the implementation of the first generation of Cooperation Frameworks and make recommendations to inform the next generation. It will inform the ongoing revision of the Cooperation Framework Guidance, the revision of the MAF, and the implementation of the forthcoming 2024 QCPR resolution.

The primary users of the evaluation are UNSDG entities at the headquarters level, and the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO). Other key users include UNSDG entities at regional-level, UN Country Teams, Resident Coordinators, and UN Member States (as host governments and members of UN development system governing bodies).

Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions address the following broad areas:

EQ 1: Relevance and integration of guidance: addresses the adequacy and clarity of the Cooperation Framework Guidance and the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) and how these tools help Resident Coordinators (RCs) and UN entities deliver Cooperation Frameworks and reconfigure UNCTs.

EQ 2: Execution of guidance on derivation: examines how RCs and UNCTs have applied the guidance on derivation in different contexts and provides a more granular look at variability and execution.

EQ 3: Execution of UNCT configuration guidance: assesses how effectively UNCTs are configuring themselves to meet country needs, including how the configuration exercises were executed, and

explores factors influencing implementation, such as organisational stances and the role of national governments.

EQ 4: Outcomes of derivation and configuration exercises:

focuses on measurable outcomes, such as the extent to which entities' programmes reflect Cooperation Frameworks, structural changes in UNCTs, and contributions to development results. Also considers unanticipated results.

Key concepts/definitions
Derivation - extent to which the planning and design of UN entities' country-specific programmes stems from, and are fully integrated with, the priorities, goals, and strategies outlined in the Cooperation Framework
Configuration - a time-bound exercise or ongoing process that 'entails a look at capacities needed to deliver on the prioritized outcomes in the Cooperation Framework'
Cooperation Framework implementation - extent to which UN entities design, budget, raise resources and implement interventions that derive from the Cooperation Framework, and undertake these activities in line with Cooperation Framework implementation plans

Scope, methodology & ethics

The evaluation is the **UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG)**, including its 37 member entities and secretariat (DCO) at country, regional and global levels. This includes funds and programmes, specialised agencies, entities working on "normative and standard setting activities", non-resident entities and entities with regional/global programmes. Humanitarian activities of UNSDG member entities (mandated by A/RES/46/182) are excluded from the evaluation scope. The evaluation is global in scope and will cover the period from the issuance of the Cooperation Framework guidance (June 2019) to the evaluation's data collection phase (Q4 2024).

The evaluation will have both formative and summative dimensions. It will take a non-experimental, theory-based approach, assessing the implementation and outcomes of the reform against a Theory of Change. It will be conducted in a transparent and participatory manner to promote its use by key stakeholders. The central analytical framework will be an evaluation matrix, connecting an appropriate mix of data sources and collection methods to each evaluation question/sub-question and enabling triangulation and comparative analysis.

Data collection methods will include:

- Key informant interviews and focus group discussions
- Review of administrative, monitoring & survey data

- Document review
- Possible validation survey

Data collection will be carried out at HQ, regional and **country level (in 21 sampled "focus countries"¹)**.

The evaluation will be conducted in line with the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.

Evaluation team

The evaluation team is **independent and comprised of UNSDG-SWEO staff and consultants**. The team will work under the guidance and supervision of an inter-agency evaluation management group and the UNSDG-SWEO Executive Director. The core team includes:

Dr Daniel Arghiros - Team Leader
Carlotta de Vivanco - Technical Specialist
Tom Barton - Evaluation Manager/Team Member
Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlstrom - Desk Review Lead
Nicholas Chua - Evaluation Analyst

Management & governance

The **UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office** has overall responsibility for steering the system-wide evaluation from start to completion in a credible, transparent, and utilisation-focused manner, in adherence with UNEG norms and standards.

An **Evaluation Management Group**, chaired by the Executive Director of the SWEO and including staff from the evaluation offices of UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC and WFP, will provide expertise and advice on appropriate evaluation design, data collection and analysis methods, advice on secondary data sources and primary data collection opportunities, and first-level quality assurance of evaluation deliverables.

An **Evaluation Reference Group** representing the evaluation's users (UNSDG entities) will be engaged at key points in the evaluation process (including the preparation of the ToR) to comment on the approach, validate findings, and participate in the development of recommendations, ensuring that the evaluation is relevant and useful.

An **Evaluation Advisory Group** composed of independent experts with professional or research experience in UN reform issues will be engaged at various stages of the evaluation process to provide thought leadership and external viewpoints.

Timeline

Preparation & Scoping:	Apr - Jul 2024
Inception:	Jul - Oct 2024
Data Collection/Analysis:	Oct 2024 - Jan 2025
Reporting:	Feb - May 2025
Dissemination:	May 2025 -

¹ Albania, Angola, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Botswana, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, Mali,

Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Viet Nam