



Terms of Reference:

**Evaluation of
the Joint SDG Fund, 2019-2021**

January 2022

Executive Office of the Secretary-General
United Nations

Final TOR

Evaluation of the Joint SDG Fund, 2019-2022

This Terms Of Reference (TOR) deal with the objectives, scope and appropriate methodological approaches for a evaluation of the Joint SDG Fund, 2019-2021.

The Secretary-General in his 2020 QCPR report (A/75/79) proposed steps to strengthen independent system-wide evaluations (SWE). The proposal clarified the focus of system-wide evaluations at global level: “At the global level, the focus will be on the planning, conducting, reporting and resourcing of system-wide evaluations, and sharing knowledge across them. Multi-Partner Trust Funds such as the Joint SDG Fund, the Spotlight Initiative Fund, and the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund - where a large number of UN entities are working towards a common objective - will be evaluated. System-wide evaluations at the three levels [country, region and global] will be mutually reinforcing.”

The Joint SDG Fund was set up in 2017, and fully operationalized with a TOR and core funding in November 2018, as an inter-agency pooled fund to mobilize resources and address the need for better integrated and multi-sectoral policy solutions and financing at the country level to meet the SDGs. The initiative for a dedicated pooled fund originated in the UNDG lead by UNDP in partnerships with ILO, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, who together became the inaugural member of the Fund’s Operational Steering Committee.

After its establishment by the inter-agency process, the Joint SDG Fund was linked with the UNDS reform and highlighted by the SG in his report on the repositioning of the UNDS as the “muscle” of RCs and the new generation of UNCTs to help countries deliver on the SDGs ([A/72/684](#), 2018). As a response, the QCPR resolution ([A/RES/72/279](#), 2018) called on Member States to capitalize the Fund at \$290 million per annum, which has become part of the QCPR Funding Compact.

The Joint SDG Fund¹ supports countries as they accelerate their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the programmatic level, the Fund operates through joint programmes (JPs) that provide the mechanism for transformative solutions implemented by governments and national stakeholders and supported by the UNCTs led by Resident Coordinators (RCs). Strategic direction for the Fund is provided by the Strategic Advisory Group chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General as the chair of UN Sustainable Development Group. The Fund is managed by the Operational Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of 5 UN entities, and with the support from the Secretariat of the Fund. The UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) hosts the Fund Secretariat and provides for the alignment with the broader UN Development System reforms. The Administrative Agent of the Fund, in charge of financial management, is the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTF-O). Official documents (e.g. Terms of

¹ *Foundational Documents:*

- [UNGA Resolution 71/243 QCPR of Operational Activities for Development of the UN system \(2016\)](#) Called on the need of coherent and integrated support towards the SDGs and urged better use of inter-agency pooled funding mechanisms to support common objectives and cross-cutting issues.
- [SG Report on the repositioning the UNDS to deliver on the 2030 Agenda A/72/684 \(2018\)](#) Emphasized the Joint SDG Fund as the ‘muscle’ for the RC and requested the Member States contributions to the Joint SDG Fund with an annual financing envelop of \$290 million per annum.
- [Our Common Agenda \(2021\)](#): Secretary-General’s vision on the future of global cooperation and reinvigorating inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism designed to accelerate the achievements of the SDGs.

Reference and Operational Guidance) of the Fund, the progress reports and information on funding can be found on the [Gateway portal](#).

As of December 2021, the Joint SDG Fund has approved programmatic commitments worth \$205 million, with initial investments starting in late 2019, in a diverse portfolio of joint programmes designed to promote integrated policy change in social protection and leaving no one behind as well as in developing SDG financing strategies and catalytic investments that have potential in leveraging additional resources at scale for SDG acceleration. The Fund is currently in the process of releasing an additional \$30 million for SIDS in a unique window designed to address SIDS vulnerabilities and build resilience.

Joint SDG Fund budget and programming status by calls for proposals/portfolio

Calls / Portfolios	Approved Budget	# JPs	Countries/territories
Integrated social protection	\$70.6 million	35	39
SDG financing strategy (C1)	\$59.1 million	62	69
SDG investments (C2)	\$37.2 million	28	28
SIDS resilience building	\$30 million	26*	42
Fund Secretariat & Admin	\$8.4 million		
Total	\$205.3 million	151 JPs	118

* The Joint Programmes for the SIDS call are currently under review.

With such programmatic commitments, the Joint SDG Fund has fully programmed all pledged commitments of \$200 million from its donor base received since 2018. That said, the mobilized resources have been below the capitalization of \$290 million per annum that is required to fully implement the mandate of the Joint Fund as requested by the UN Secretary-General and endorsed by the UN General Assembly resolution [A/RES/72/279](#).

1. Objectives

The overarching purpose of the evaluation of the Joint SDG Fund's is to measure progress of results, assess how the fund has positioned itself to achieve its strategic objectives, and be forward looking in terms of its future strategic objective of catalysing and influencing larger funding for achieving SDGs as outlined in the Fund's Terms of Reference (TOR). As a forward-looking evaluation it will make recommendations on how to better position the Joint SDG Fund within the UNSDG as well as the wider development context, and better manage the Fund to accelerate UN collaborative action to support developing countries during the decade of action.

To this end, the evaluation will make a forward looking assessment of the Fund for it to enable the UN Resident Coordinators and the new generation of UN Country Teams to help countries devise and implement integrated policy and financing solutions for the SDGs. It will make an assessment of how the Joint SDG Fund has adapted to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Furthermore, the evaluation will focus on Joint SDG Fund's results and accountability to its diverse stakeholder groups. The evaluation will pay particular attention to how the Joint SDG fund has managed cross cutting issues such as human rights, gender equality and leaving no one behind.

2. Scope of the Evaluation

The programmatic scope of the evaluation will primarily build on the theory of change of the Joint SDG Fund as presented in its TOR:

“The Joint SDG Fund is designed specifically to support accelerated catalytic change towards the SDGs at national level. It complements existing funding mechanisms by providing specific added value based on the UN’s comparative advantage in enabling transformative actions on the SDGs through linking integrated policy and financing, and balancing between the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The Joint SDG Fund will incentivize collaboration among UN Country Team under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator in order to support an integrated approach to the SDGs at the country-level and leverage the convening and partnership development role of the UN. This will further help bring together and improve collaboration among diverse stakeholders and development partners, and improve the synergy between their individual efforts and initiatives.

To strengthen the capacity of country-led SDG actions on integrated policy and financing, the Joint SDG Fund will ensure that supported programmes are embedded in UNDAFs5 and enhance national ownership, leadership and capacities. UN Country Teams will be responsible for strategic coordination and effective collaboration with domestic and international partners and help to build new coalitions around SDG policy and financing. Programmes will mainstream human rights, gender, youth, and environment, and operationalize the principle of Leaving No One Behind. This is particularly relevant for promoting innovation, but at the same time safeguard international norms and standards. Aside from providing funds to joint programmes at the country level, the Joint SDG Fund will pool expertise across the UN Development System and create strategic partnerships within and outside the UN at global, regional and local levels6.

The focus will be on improving collaboration within UN Country Teams (under the leadership of UN Resident Coordinators), which will be done through demand-driven and context-specific joint programmes designed and delivered by the stakeholders involved. Programmes will support the development of mechanisms for integrated policy and financing that reflect the interdependent nature of the SDGs. Increased cohesion of policy and development results - accompanied by the focus on levers for systemic change and catalytic finance and investment – is expected to lead to accelerated accomplishment of the SDGs at the national level, which will contribute to the accomplishment of the SDGs at the global level.

The overarching justification for the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda is to strengthen national capacities for country-led processes and actions in line with the 2030 Agenda, by supporting integrated approaches to multi and cross-sectorial policies that accelerate the process of achieving the SDG. The underlying assumption is that the combination of integrated transformative policies and leveraging of resources from a variety of partners will help national governments and national institutions develop sustainable solutions that may expand the scale and the scope of their interventions and investments for achieving the SDGs. The second assumption is that the UN, at this point in time, is better positioned to support governments and relevant partners due to, amongst others, the new country and global dynamics based on the 2030 Agenda, the UN Country Teams’ accumulated experience in joint programming, the next generation of UNDAFs, and the ongoing reform of the UN Development System.”

The primary focus of the evaluation will be to assess to which extent there are gaps between the Joint SDG Fund's achievement and its strategic intentions in relations to the UNDS reform. The assessment will also assess how the Fund has leveraged UN joint action for strategic and collective progress against the SDGs at the country level especially under the impact of COVID-19. The evaluation will examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the Fund's governance structures and the the lead role provided by DCO, EOSG and the RC/UNCTs to better manage the Fund at both the global and country levels. The evaluation will also examine the extent to which the Fund was able to incentivize cross-cutting issues such as human rights, disability inclusion, gender equality and climate resilience taking into account the impact of COVID-19 in different geographic and developmental contexts. The evaluation will also be build upon lessons from other pooled funding mechanisms such as the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund or the Peacebuilding Fund, while assessing the Joint SDG Fund's potential value proposition in comparison with other pool and joint funding mechanism.

The evaluation will cover the period from January 2019 to March 2022 when the Joint SDG Fund was fully operational through its launch of calls for proposals and implementation of joint programmes on integrated upstream policies and SDG financing at the country levels. The evaluation will use a system-wide approach and be inclusive of all stakeholders including donors and partner countries.

The design of the evaluation will take into account the UN Development Reform objectives, Funding Compact and the Report of the Secretary General: Review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda and its implication for the UN development system at the country level.

The evaluation will address the following **Areas of Investigation (Aoi)**²:

1. The extent that the Joint SDG Fund has lived up to the expectations of the Fund's strategic intentions and expected level of capitalization. This will encompass the Fund contribution to accelerating the SDGs at the country level but also taking into account the impact of COVID-19 and the UNDS reform.

- To which extent are there gaps between the Joint SDG Fund's achievements and the strategic intentions of the Joint Fund especially in relation to the Fund's contributions to UNDS reform and to accelerating the SDGs at the country level? (Relevance, Effectiveness,)
- What are the opportunities and challenges for the Fund to reach a scale in its capitalization to bring about transformative change in support of the UNDS reform and implications from the impact of COVID-19 on SDGs? (Effectiveness, Sustainability)

2. The extent of changes needed for the Fund to have a more effective and inclusive governance structure and build a coalition for the SDGs including with key UNSDG entities – big and small –

² The areas of investigation and underlying questions are generated from key stakeholder interviews with donors, UN senior leaders and entities, RCs and bilateral organization evaluation officials, carried out between November 29 and December 3 during the scoping phase of the evaluation, which was led by Indran Nadiioo, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluations at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

and governments, donors, as well as international financial institutions and private sector partners both at the global and country levels based on lessons and comparisons with similar pooled and thematic funds.

- What changes are needed for the Joint SDG Fund to have a more inclusive governance structure and build a coalition for the SDGs including with key UNSDG entities, governments/donors, and other public and private stakeholders both at the global and country levels? (coherence)
- Are there any lessons from the experience of similar funds especially the COVID-19 MPTF, Peacebuilding Fund or Spotlight Fund that could be learned to govern and manage the Fund for better impact? (Efficiency)

3. The extent that the Joint SDG Fund has been able to achieve or maintain a substantial focus on investing in the CFs and country priorities, emphasizing cross-cutting areas, accelerating upstream policy solutions for leaving no one behind and integrated social protection and playing a lead role in devising financing frameworks and catalytic investments for the SDGs at the country level.

- How effective has the Joint SDG Fund been in achieving its expected results in its main areas of programming including promoting integrated social protection, devising integrated financing frameworks and catalysing public and private investments for the SDGs? (Effectiveness)
- How has the Joint SDG Fund incorporated UN core values and cross-cutting priorities of furthering human rights, gender, youth, and environment, and operationalize the principle of Leaving No One Behind, and substantially contributed to results embedded in the CFs and country priorities? (Coherence)

4. The extent that the UN senior leadership has guided the strategy and management of the Joint SDG Fund both at the global and country levels with the RCs taking a lead role with the UNCTs in the management of the fund, while DCO and UNSDG entities provide global coordination under the strategic oversight and attention from the Executive Office of the Secretary General.

- Are changes needed in the roles of DCO and EOSG in terms of the Fund's governance taking into account the Fund's contributions to the UNDS Reform and to enhance visibility and leadership of the Fund to stakeholders? (Relevance, Efficiency)
- What changes are required in the guidance to and capacities of the RC/UNCT to better manage the Joint SDG Fund programmes and ensure ownership of local partners at the country level? (Efficiency, Sustainability)

5. The extent that the Joint SDG Fund has influenced UNDS reform and collaborative results at the country level during a time of COVID-19 with a forward-looking focus on how the fund needs clear value proposition to revitalize the fund for scale with guidance from the UNSDG entities and donors alike.

- How can the fund be an incentive for the UNCTs to better work together in terms of delivering catalytic and transformative services, communicating results and ensuring accountability under the RC system? (Effectiveness, Impact)

- How can the Fund better support the joint programmatic elements of investments into the UNSDCF and RC system with a clear value proposition to revitalize the fund for scale? (Effectiveness, Sustainability)

6. The extent that the Joint SDG Fund has ensured quality of programming, dynamism and visibility through collective action.

- How has the Fund managed its portfolio of programmes in terms of identifying quality joint programmes, ensuring transformative results, and visibility through collective action at the country level? (Efficiency)
- How can the Fund become more efficient and effective by simplifying its procedures/guidelines and eligibility criteria to ensure flexible and quick processing of proposals building on lessons from other MPTFs while also recognizing opportunity costs for RCs/UNCTs when proposals are not selected? (Efficiency, Effective)

The individual evaluation questions takes note of the OECD DAC Evaluation criteria.³ The primary audiences for this evaluation are United Nations member states, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the UN Sustainable Development Group member agencies, Resident Coordinators and UNCT entities, the UN Development Coordination Office, and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office.

3. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The evaluation will rely on the following data collection methods, always with the core focus on the country and the UNCT as the central unit of analysis. Therefore, the evaluation will be guided at country level by the DCO/UNEG Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.⁴

- Financial flows of the Fund including the distribution among calls/windows and type of countries and UN entities (including percentage spent on administrative costs).
- A mix of desk-based and field-oriented country case studies focusing on the Fund's contributions to accelerating the SDGs through UNDS reform and collaboration.
- Document reviews and key informant interviews at global and regional level.
- Quantitative summaries of results reporting and RBM data and indicators as reported by the Joint SDG Fund at both the global and country levels.

The inception phase will include an accounting of the results and documents of Joint SDG Fund and a plan for synthesizing the findings of these results and relevant documentations. The data

³ As elaborated by the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation in "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation, Revised Evaluation Criteria and Principles for Use". November, 2019.

⁴ United Nations Development Cooperation Office/United Nations Evaluation Group, *Guidelines for the Evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework*, September 2021.

collection will adhere to principles and guidance of conducting evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic as outlined under section 5.

4. Country Case Study Sampling

The number of case study countries will be determined during the inception stage of the evaluation based on the resources available and logistical and operational realities. The case studies will facilitate gathering evidence at country level. Countries will be selected for field-based data collection based on criteria to be elaborated during the inception phase but which may include, for example, different national socio-economic contexts, geographic regions, thematic focus areas and/or others to be determined. The country case studies will adhere to principles and guidance of conducting evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic as outlined under section 5.

5. Conducting an Evaluation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

It is essential that the evaluation should be designed and carried out in an ethical way during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The UN OIOS Synthesis of Guidelines for UN Evaluation Under COVID-19 reviewed 11 sets of UN guidelines and classified the results under three headings: Guiding Principles, Work Planning and Evaluation Approaches. Within that grouping some of the guidelines of special relevance to the evaluation include⁵:

Guiding Principles:

- Adapt throughout the evaluation
- Do no harm and prioritize safety

Work Planning

- Assess criticality and limitations
- Adjust scope as required
- Develop work plan scenarios

Evaluation Approaches

- Greater reliance on secondary data
- Development of hybrid data collection models.

The development of the detailed evaluation operational plan during the inception phase will be guided by the guidelines highlighted above, with particular attention to adoptability, flexible work planning and the use of hybrid models where appropriate. Most importantly, the evaluation plan will prioritize the guiding principle of do no harm.

The evaluation will follow the subsidiarity principle call for system-wide evaluation to focus its attention on system-wide aspects that are not sufficiently addressed through other existing UN accountability mechanisms. To this end the system wide evaluation will focus on collective results at the country level and it will not be evaluating results of the programmes of UNCT

⁵ *Synthesis of Guidelines for UN Evaluation Under COVID-19*, Office of Internal Oversight Services, Inspection and Evaluation Division, June 2020, page 2

members which is expected to be covered by the agencies programme evaluations. This is in line with the guidance of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF/CF) evaluation guidelines prepared by UNEG/DCO. Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations will continue to be the mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of system-wide humanitarian response efforts to major emergencies and will not be duplicated by the system-wide evaluation.

The Inception Phase of the evaluation will include identification of key risks and mitigation measures to address those risks. These would include, for example, the risk of duplication of effort between the evaluation and recently completed or ongoing evaluations by UNDS members regarding the system-wide response. They would also include the effects of the pandemic itself on the ability to conduct data collection at country level. During the Inception Phase of the evaluation, different models for conducting country-case studies under uncertainty and evolving conditions of COVID-19 will be explored, including possibly use of hybrid models of desk and field-based studies. Emphasis will be placed on identifying flexible approaches which can be adjusted as needed to reflect conditions in the case study countries.

6. Operational Planning and Timelines

The evaluation will be carried out in three phases: inception, data collection, and reporting.

Planning Phase. The evaluation team will be recruited in December 2021/January 2022. The planning phase will include interviews with key stakeholders at global and UNCT level aimed at refining the areas of investigation and refining the evaluation questions.

In addition, the inception phase will involve a document review of Joint SDG Fund's results, including annual reports, mid-term reviews and country level documents for use in both the desk and field-based country case studies. The result of the Inception Phase will be a plan for the evaluation including any refinement of the evaluation questions.

The inception phase will also finalize the sample set of desk and field-based case study countries. The feasibility of travel to case study countries will be decided during the planning phase of the evaluation given the evolving nature of the pandemic.

Data Collection Phase. As well as the country case studies (which will use on-site and remote data collection methods as required), the data collection phase will require completion of the document review and global level key informant interviews. The results of country case studies will be shared with the relevant UNCTs through the RC and will be finalized before the end of the data collection phase. The evaluation manager, the evaluation team and the QA expert will meet regularly during the course of data collection and analysis phases to monitor progress and address gaps in the data. The data collection phase will also allow for refining and updating of the theory of change. It will run from February to April 2022.

Analysis and Reporting Phase. Up to two three-day data consolidation workshops will be held non-virtually in a location central to the team members and the evaluation manager. The location will be chosen with a view to reducing travel costs and ensuring full participation by the team. If meeting in a central location is not possible, a series of shorter on-line working groups sessions will be substituted. The draft final report will be submitted by May/June 2022.

7. Management and Governance

The evaluation will be managed by the Senior Coordinator, System-Wide Evaluation in line with the SG's proposal to the QCPR.

The evaluation will be guided by an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). The ERG will consider the inception report, and draft final report and make recommendations on the quality of analysis and if the products fulfill the terms of reference. The main perspective sought from the ERG concerns the extent that the evaluation fulfills its objectives and provides the strategic and operational perspectives needed to advance the work of UNCTs in responding to the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 and the effective pursuit of the SDGs. The ERG will meet a minimum of two times during the evaluation – to review the draft inception report, and draft final report – to guide the evaluation products. The ERG will consist of representatives from donors, RCs, two from the Joint SDG Fund Secretariat and evaluation experts.

A Quality Assurance Panel will provide independent advice to the Senior Coordinator, System-Wide Evaluation and the evaluation team on evaluation methodology, logic of analysis, and UN development reform aspects. The Quality Assurance Panel acts as a continuous advisor for the evaluation. All the evaluation products and case studies are appraised and commented on by the Senior Expert. The Quality Assurance Panel joins the meetings of the Evaluation Reference Group.

8. The Evaluation Team

The proposed team consists of 2 consultants (one team leader and one technical expert) who will have complementary expertise in the areas of UN reform, integrated financing, gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and LNOB. The consultants will have previously conducted comprehensive multi-sectoral evaluations. The team is expected to be balanced in terms of gender and geographic origin. The team members or their institutions will not have been involved in the design, implementation, or monitoring of the Joint SDG Fund programmes, nor will they have other conflict of interest or bias on the subject.

Team Leader

- Demonstrated experience of socio-economic programming and knowledge of UN development reform processes;
- Strong team leadership and management track record and commitment to delivering timely and high-quality evaluation reports;
- Extensive evaluation expertise (at least 10-15 years) including knowledge of human rights- and gender-responsive methods;
- Experience at team leader of complex, multi-sectoral evaluations involving multi-disciplinary teams
- Familiarity with UN programming, policy and advocacy work, and experience in evaluating multi-sectoral initiatives would be an asset;
- Good interpersonal and communication skills; ability to interact with various stakeholders and to concisely express ideas and concepts in written and oral form;
- Extensive experience in managing multi-disciplinary evaluation teams;
- Language proficiency: Fluency in English is mandatory; good command of French is desirable.

Team Member

- Significant experience in evaluation and/or policy research, with background in country programme evaluation, evaluation of gender equality and human rights-based approaches to programming;
- In-depth understanding of the UN system and UN reform and SDG integrated financing, and experience in evaluating multi-sectoral programmes or initiatives;
- Strong conceptualization, analytical, and writing skills and ability to work effectively in a team;
- Hands-on experience in collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data;
- Knowledge of the UN's human rights, gender equality and equity agendas and application in evaluation;
- Good communication and people skills; ability to communicate with various stakeholders and to express ideas and concepts concisely and clearly in written and oral form;
- Language proficiency: Fluency in English is mandatory; good command over other UN official language(s) is desirable.

In addition, the evaluation may draw on external subject matter experts to provide limited and precisely defined contextual and thematic inputs.

9. Expected Deliverables

A plan for the evaluation (max 10 pages): following an initial desk review and interviews.

For case study countries, a brief of 3-4 pages and power point presentation will be prepared to facilitate presentation to UNCT.

One interim report (the scope to be determined during the planning phase) in March 2022

A final report (max 60 pages, including the executive summary and excluding annexes) May/June 2022.

Acronyms

CF	Cooperation Framework (UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework)
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCO	Development Coordination Office
EAG	Evaluation Advisory Groups
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
GE	Gender Equality
HR	Human Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
LNOB	Leave no one behind
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
QA Panel	Quality Assurance Panel
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RBM	Results based management
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SERP	Socio-Economic Response Plan
SG	UN Secretary General
SWE	System-Wide Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN OIOS	UN Office of Internal Oversight Services
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Populations Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDG	UN Sustainable Development Group
WFP	UN World Food Programme