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Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council

United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Office

Report of the Executive Director

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Summary

This annual report provides an update on the functioning and the work of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) System-Wide Evaluation Office. This report is presented pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/226 which requests the Executive Director to present the annual report to the Economic and Social Council at its operational activities for development segment.

The Office was established, as set out in the Secretary-General's report (A/72/684-E/2018/7), to provide a unique function of assessing the system-wide contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Marking the first full year with the Executive Director appointed, the System-Wide Evaluation Office advanced on a series of administration and evaluative matters, including releasing the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy and a series of evaluations. Despite the initial success establishing the office, the scarcity of financial resources for the office has hindered the ability of the office to provide evaluations at the pace intended and presents longer term concerns about the ability of the office to survive with limited voluntary resources.

The report highlights the value and strategic importance of the work of the SWEO in meeting the expectations of the General Assembly first affirmed in resolution 64/289. It provides information on the system-wide evaluation function, highlighting learning from system-wide evaluation activities, the main achievements for 2024, including the adoption of the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy. It also presents the 2025 programme of work and budget for the System-Wide Evaluation Office and the resourcing plans, and information on country-level United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations.



I. Introduction

1. In his report on “*Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet*” (A/72/684-E/2018/7), the Secretary-General set out his plan to make the United Nations development system more strategic, accountable, collaborative and responsive to national development needs and priorities, including through the establishment of an independent system-wide evaluation office.
2. The General Assembly, in its resolution 72/279, welcomed the strengthening of independent system-wide evaluation measures by the Secretary-General, including measures to improve capacities. Subsequently, in its resolution 76/4, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide Member States with the information needed to fully support and facilitate the establishment and functioning of an independent and well-resourced Evaluation Office. The Secretary-General provides this information in his regular reports to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the implementation of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.¹
3. System-wide evaluation provides a whole-of-United Nations approach with a focus on collective performance, results and learning across the development system to assess the combined contributions of United Nations entities to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is the only evaluative function that assesses the contributions across the entire UN development system.
4. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) is responsible for the provision of independent evaluation evidence to strengthen learning, transparency and accountability, to incentivize joint work and collective learning, and to conduct system-wide evaluations and advance evidence from them on the United Nations development system’s contribution towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.
5. This is the first annual report of the SWEO in accordance with the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 79/226. The resolution requests, beginning in 2025, to “present the annual report of the Executive Director of the System-wide Evaluation Office, to the Economic and Social Council at its operational activities for development segment”.
6. In his report A/79/72-E/2024/12, the Secretary-General noted priorities for 2024 including finalization of the system-wide evaluation policy and progress in building foundational elements of the SWEO as a stand-alone independent office providing leadership and strategic guidance for the system-wide evaluation function in accordance with this policy, following the appointment of the first Executive Director in 2023.
7. In 2024, considerable progress was made in consolidating the Office’s foundations to ensure its independence, credibility, and effectiveness, in line with the expectations of E/RES/2023/31. The adoption of the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy² is a key achievement, benefiting from consultations with UNSDG entities and United Nations oversight bodies. The policy is the culmination of much consideration by Member States of the need to understand better the collective contribution of the United Nations development system to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
8. In 2024, SWEO increased awareness and understanding of its unique function, demonstrating its contribution to system-wide learning, transparency and accountability by publishing two reports: the Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls³ and the parallel Value for Money Assessment.⁴ The evaluation confirmed the effectiveness of over \$500 million invested in an inter-agency model to end violence against women and girls. It made recommendations to improve delivery and harmonize business practices to deliver coherent, integrated support and maximizing collective results.

¹ A/79/72-E/2024/12, A/78/72-E/2023/59 and A/77/69-E/2022/47

² *UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy, 2024*

³ *Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative (2017-2023), 2024*

⁴ *Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative, 2024*

9. In response to the request from the General Assembly in its resolution 78/166, SWEO led an initiative to bridge the gap between the production of evaluation evidence by United Nations entities, and its strategic use by intergovernmental bodies and United Nations leadership. Collaborating with United Nations evaluation offices, SWEO provided user-friendly products to improve accessibility and use of evaluation evidence for the 2024 QCPR. This included publishing interactive digital maps of United Nations system evaluation evidence on QCPR mandates and the Sustainable Development Goals, and evidence summaries on priority topics for the QCPR.
10. SWEO commenced two system-wide evaluations of salience to Member States, both to be completed in 2025. The first evaluation assesses progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams assesses progress on key aspects of United Nations development system repositioning (72/279) and aims to learn lessons from the first generation of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, under implementation in more than 120 countries. The second evaluation of the 2019 United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy contributes to accountability and lesson learning on disability inclusion across the United Nations system.
11. As set out by Member States and the Secretary General, the system-wide evaluation function relies on the commitment and engagement of all UNSDG entities for the function to be effective and useful. Leadership for this unique function is provided by the SWEO. In 2024, the SWEO continued to strengthen engagement with key stakeholders including Member States, United Nations entities and evaluation and oversight bodies, and establishing partnerships with key international evaluation and evidence bodies.
12. Adequate, predictable, and sustainable resourcing of SWEO is a fundamental requirement to ensure its independence, credibility and effectiveness, as re-emphasized by the General Assembly in resolution 79/226. To secure adequate and predictable funding for the SWEO, the Secretary-General submitted a proposed programme budget for 2025 setting out a total requirement of USD 3.4 million.
13. The General Assembly, in its resolution 79/257, endorsed the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/79/7), which has recommended against the proposed conversion of extrabudgetary resources to regular budget funding in 2025, noting that further explanation was needed on the complementarity of with United Nations oversight bodies and evaluation offices, and the scarcity of extrabudgetary resources.
14. In light of this decision, SWEO continues to be reliant on extra-budgetary resources and seeks to broaden the funding base for its work in 2025 with a revised budget of USD 3.01 million.

II. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Policy: guiding system-wide evaluation to achieve Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals

15. The [UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy](#) was formally adopted by the UNSDG in November 2024. It responds to Member State demands to better understand the collective contribution of the United Nations development system articulated by the General Assembly in A/RES/64/289 and with the proposals set out by the Secretary-General on the repositioning the United Nations development system in A/72/684-E/2018/7⁵ to make the United Nations development system more strategic and accountable, which included the establishment of a system-wide evaluation office.
16. The policy establishes the framework, guiding principles and procedures for system-wide evaluation, detailing roles, responsibilities, reporting arrangements to ensure effective planning, conduct, and follow-up. It defines the key users of system-wide evaluation evidence and mechanisms for maximizing its use. The policy confirms two types of system-wide evaluation within the United Nations development system: Cooperation Framework evaluations and global system-wide evaluations, following the provisions set out in

the policy under the overall leadership and guidance of the SWEO. It also defines resources and risks and details of policy implementation and review.

17. The policy subscribes to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards⁶ for evaluation complemented by additional principles of complementarity, subsidiarity, and collaboration that are particularly important for system-wide evaluations. It is anticipated that the policy framework will evolve over time to reflect Member States' guidance contained in ECOSOC resolutions and subsequent QCPR resolutions of the General Assembly.

Priorities for policy implementation

18. In 2024, considerable progress has been made in consolidating the foundations of the Office to ensure its independence, credibility, and effectiveness, in line with the provisions of the policy, including design of operational systems for the planning, conduct, follow-up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations clarifying of the institutional arrangements for system-wide evaluations; and engagement with United Nations evaluation and oversight bodies.
19. Further priorities for policy implementation in 2025, include: preparation of the first multi-year Global System-Wide Evaluation Plan; consolidation of quality assurance and assessment and management response and follow up systems; mechanisms to enhance coordination and oversight of system-wide evaluation.

Global System-Wide Evaluation Plan

20. The SWEO is intended to conduct a small number of evaluations on the most strategic and relevant system-wide issues related to the United Nations development system. The Office independently determines a multi-year programme of work, following an open and transparent consultative process with Member States and United Nations entities on the topics and timings of the proposed evaluations. With limited availability of voluntary funding, the topics and timing of evaluations have so far been reliant on availability of funds and funders' priorities.
21. The SWEO is preparing a four-year Global System-Wide Evaluation Plan aligned with the priorities set out in General Assembly resolution 79/226. It outlines the purpose, scope and resources of global system-wide evaluations and related activities. The Global System-Wide Evaluation workplan is based on UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy criteria, balancing consultation and transparency with the prerogative of the UNSDG SWEO to exercise independence in selecting evaluations. In preparing the Plan, the SWEO consults with the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Joint Inspection Unit, and the Board of Auditors in line with the current mechanisms used to promote cooperation between these entities.
22. Potential evaluations are identified through a systematic approach drawing on independent analyses, mapping of available evaluation evidence and taking into account the work of United Nations evaluation and oversight bodies including the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Joint Inspection Unit.

Quality assurance and assessment mechanisms

23. Credibility and use of system-wide evaluations is underpinned by quality evaluations that have undergone robust quality assurance processes. SWEO is consolidating guidance and quality assurance mechanisms for system-wide evaluations to maintain adherence to the evaluation policy principles, norms and standards and UNEG Norms and Standards building on the procedures for commissioning, management, quality assurance, and reporting, currently implemented by SWEO.
24. The policy specifies that independent external assessors evaluate the quality of all completed system-wide evaluations, including Cooperation Framework evaluations Results should be made publicly available alongside the evaluation reports and reported annually by SWEO. In 2025, SWEO will set requirements for

⁶ *UNEG Norms and Standards for evaluation in the UN system*

the establishment of independent quality assessment for all completed system-wide evaluations. However, progress is dependent on availability of adequate and predictable resources.

Management response and follow up database

- 25. Evaluation recommendations require robust and transparent mechanisms to prepare timely management responses, and all system-wide evaluations require a formal management response with follow-up actions recorded and implementation tracked to ensure meaningful impact.
- 26. The policy envisages that the Development Coordination Office, as the UNSDG Secretariat, will work with United Nations entities to facilitate reporting on the implementation of the management responses through existing mechanisms and that progress on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations will be reported annually by the Executive Director of the UNSDG SWEO.
- 27. This requires the development of a database, which is envisaged in 2025, subject to the availability of resources.

Mechanisms to enhance coordination, collaboration and oversight of system-wide evaluation

- 28. Given the shared nature of the system-wide evaluation function, the policy sets out mechanisms for SWEO coordination with evaluation and oversight bodies, including the establishment of two dedicated mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of system-wide evaluation in 2025: (i) System-Wide Evaluation Steering Group, consisting of heads of entity evaluation offices, to provide advice, inputs and resources to the design conduct, dissemination and use of system-wide evaluations products; (ii) independent Evaluation Advisory Panel, consisting of experts in evaluation and development to provide substantive strategic advice on implementation of the policy.

III. System-Wide Evaluation Office programme of work in 2024

- 29. The delivery of timely system-wide evaluation reports with relevant and targeted recommendations is intended to strengthen learning and accountability for development system results and to improve performance, collaboration and alignment of United Nations development system entities. Table 1 sets out the implementation status of the evaluation activities planned in 2024.

Table 1. Implementation status of planned evaluation activities, 2024

#	Title	Status	Planned completion	Management response issued	Status of implementation of recommendations
1	Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls	Completed		Yes	On-going
2	Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative	Completed		n/a	
3	Enhancing the use of United Nations evaluation evidence in support of the 2024 QCPR - evaluation summaries	Completed		n/a	

4	Enhancing the use of United Nations evaluation evidence in support of the 2024 QCPR - interactive evidence maps	Completed		n/a	
5	System-wide evaluation on progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams	On-going	2025		
6	System-wide evaluation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy	On-going	2025		

Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls

30. The Spotlight Initiative was an investment of more than 500 million USD which leveraged the United Nations expertise to address both the drivers and consequences of violence against women and girls through 26 country programmes, five regional programmes, one thematic regional programme and two civil society programmes. The evaluation assessed its overall performance and contribution to United Nations development system reform and informed the design and implementation of Spotlight Initiative 2.0.⁷
31. The evaluation presents findings under seven main areas of investigation including programme design; management and operationalization; governance, leadership and coherence; results and progress; United Nations reform and new ways of working; and sustainability.
32. Overall, the evaluation found proof of concept for the Spotlight Initiative model while also highlighting areas for improvement. The comprehensive design demonstrated the ability of an integrated, inter-agency approach to ending violence against women and girls to contribute to higher-order changes at regional, national and local levels. The Spotlight Initiative responded to contextual changes to deliver important results across pillars, while deepening understanding across stakeholders of the need for a broad range of actors to work collaboratively. The governance model had expanded stakeholder engagement, particularly with an elevated role for civil society. While noting these achievements, the evaluation found that programme delivery was significantly challenged by a complicated operational model and by limitations in the compatibility of United Nations administrative and financial systems, which restricted their capacity to function collaboratively. While some elements and activities of the Initiative show signs of continuation, the sustainability of the overarching approach is still to be determined.
33. The evaluation made eight recommendations: 1) Maintain the key strengths of the Spotlight Initiative design while allowing for greater flexibility and adaptability, maintaining the comprehensive approach and simplifying the results framework; 2) respond to changing contexts with swiftness and agility to maintain consistent and relevant support to ending violence against women and girls, particularly in crisis and emergency contexts; 3) improve the operational model including funding modalities and human resources planning; 4) simplify monitoring and systems for learning and dissemination of knowledge; 5) extend models for civil society stakeholder engagement; 6) develop a holistic funding strategy; 7) incorporate learning to inform efforts to accelerate United Nations development system reform and collective results on ending violence against women and girls; 8) embed the Spotlight Initiative comprehensive approach into the implementation of United Nations System-Wide actions plans and processes.
34. The management response to the evaluation accepts all eight recommendations and outlines key actions to be undertaken for the design and operationalisation of Spotlight 2.0 and integration of learning into United Nations development system reform efforts and into system-wide gender frameworks and processes.

⁷ *Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative (2017-2023)*

Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls

35. In parallel to the evaluation, SWEO conducted a value for money assessment⁸ to respond to observations- by the European Court of Auditors and provide inputs to the evaluation. The assessment used an interdisciplinary approach combining evaluation theory and economic analysis.
36. The assessment rated 20 indicators under the four criteria of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. Twelve indicators were rated as good,⁷ as adequate. For one of the indicators there was insufficient evidence to make a judgement. No indicators were assessed as poor.
37. The overall rating of value for money was good.⁹ Economy, efficiency and effectiveness were rated as good, while equity was rated as adequate. The Spotlight Initiative generally met reasonable expectations and targets with acceptable progress overall. Improvements are needed in costing guidance, better coordination among UN Agencies, improvement in performance monitoring and to address equity concerns related to geographical coverage and marginalized groups.

Enhancing use of United Nations evaluation evidence in support of the 2024 QCPR

38. SWEO has an important role in strengthening the learning and use of United Nations evaluation evidence by preparing accessible and user-friendly knowledge products and dissemination tools, including evidence syntheses, summaries, and evidence maps.
39. Approximately 1,000 evaluation reports are published annually across the United Nations system, providing an extensive but fragmented evidence base. In response to the request from the General Assembly in its resolution 78/166 to provide "...status reporting, including through briefing notes, informal briefings, and case studies with emphasis on development results, on the implementation of all provisions and mandates contained in General Assembly resolution 75/233..", SWEO led an initiative¹⁰ to pilot use of artificial intelligence (AI) to make this evidence base more accessible to stakeholders involved in the 2024 QCPR. AI tools classified evaluation evidence from 940 evaluations conducted by 42 United Nations evaluation functions, across the Sustainable Development Goals¹¹ and also against 24 priority areas set out in the 2020 QCPR resolution¹². An interactive geographic map of United Nations evaluation coverage was also produced.¹³
40. The initiative provides strong proof of concept for a human-artificial intelligence collaboration with potential to accelerate the production of evidence summaries in responding to the specific interests of decision makers to complement formal reporting on the United Nations development system.
41. The initiative helped SWEO identify gaps in evaluation evidence on key QCPR priorities, such as results-based management, development financing, coordination, coherence, human resources, business operations and funding quality enabling SWEO to make recommendations to improve the system-level relevance of evaluations conducted by United Nations entities.
42. The initiative produced evaluation evidence summaries on five priority topics for the QCPR to draw on the extensive evidence generated by independent evaluations conducted across the United Nations system. Each summary draws on a system-wide sample of 25 to 50 evaluations and presents key insights related to the United Nations development system.

⁸ *Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative*, 2024

⁹ *Four standards define levels of performance (adapted to the programme) in terms of expectations, targets and progress: excellent, good, adequate and poor*

¹⁰ *Supported by IFAD, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP*

¹¹ *Coverage of Sustainable Development Goals*

¹² *Coverage of 2020 QCPR Priorities; Detailed Evidence on 2020 QCPR Priorities*

¹³ *LINK when published*

A visible shift – the independent resident coordinator¹⁴: evaluations found that, since 2019, the reinvigorated resident coordinator system has contributed to improvements in the coherence of United Nations country team analysis, planning and information sharing. Resident Coordinators have facilitated the delivery of integrated policy advice to convening entities to engage in innovative joint programmes and enabling smaller and non-resident entities to engage more fully in UN country teams. However, this progress has not yet resulted in fully coordinated delivery of operational activities. Challenges persist in the form of perceptions of increased reporting burdens; capacity and resourcing gaps and unclear roles and responsibilities and accountabilities as set out in the Management and Accountability Framework.

United Nations development system reform at the regional level¹⁵: evaluations found that regional level changes have been slower. The Regional Collaborative Platforms are not fully meeting expectations in enhancing United Nations system collaboration or deploying regional-level assets to better support countries. The Development Coordination Office has supported Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams, but its broader role in the Regional Collaborative Platforms and Issue-based Coalitions was not well understood. The Regional Economic Commissions are increasingly integrated within the wider United Nations development system, but face challenges in fully collaborating with the Resident Coordinator system and Cooperation Framework cycles.

Unlocking quality funding¹⁶: evaluations found that flexible, core and pooled funding led to more strategic, innovative United Nations development cooperation, responsive to national priorities and changing circumstances, and increased inter-agency collaboration. In contrast, tightly earmarked funding had the opposite effect. There is a growing disconnect between donor advocacy for quality funding and actions to deliver it. The evaluations emphasized the need for strategic, innovative, joint and multi-pronged resource mobilization strategies supported by entity senior leadership.

Building a whole of system response to complex settings¹⁷: evaluations found that country-level leadership capacities are often the most critical factor for promoting collaboration and coherence across different United Nations actions. Gaps in institutional capacities include conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity in humanitarian and development programming and risk-informed analytical approaches. Good practices like inclusive targeting, participatory project design, and development-peacebuilding approaches addressing gender inequality and social inclusion are inconsistently applied. Evaluations found that links between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work have been impeded both by siloed and short-term donor funding instruments, as well as internal United Nations entity siloes.

Towards sustainable food systems¹⁸: evaluations identified four fundamental factors for food systems interventions: (i) strategic, system-based and context adapted approaches; (ii) engagement in legislation and regulation; (iii) a focus on nutrition and health; and (iv) attention to human rights, gender and diversity. Successful food systems transformation relies on strengthening resilience in agricultural communities, data availability and analysis and technological innovation. However, sustainable financing for food systems has been scarce, and potential multiplier effects from UN entity collaboration on food systems interventions has not been seized.

43. Section IV provides further details on how these products were used to support Member States' deliberations on the new QCPR cycle.

System-wide evaluation on Progress Towards a New Generation of United Nations Country Teams

44. At the request of the UN Sustainable Development Group, SWEO launched the evaluation on “progress towards a new generation of United Nations Country Teams” in mid-2024. The evaluation seeks to explore “good practices and opportunities for improvement on country programmes derivation from, and alignment with, Cooperation Frameworks and United Nations country team configuration.” It is strategic and forward-

¹⁴ *A visible shift – the independent resident coordinator, 2024*

¹⁵ *United Nations development system reform at the regional level, 2024*

¹⁶ *Unlocking quality funding, 2024*

¹⁷ *Building a whole of system response to complex settings, 2024*

¹⁸ *Towards Sustainable Food Systems, 2024*

facing, covering all UNSDG entities and the Resident Coordinator system at global, regional and country levels from 2019 to 2025 and aims to learn lessons from the first generation of Cooperation Frameworks, now under implementation in more than 120 countries. The final evaluation report will be published in July 2025.

45. The preliminary findings of the evaluation indicate that the vision set out in A/RES/72/279 for a new generation of United Nations Country Teams remains highly relevant. Since 2018, the repositioning of the United Nations development system has resulted in many important improvements, notably in more coherent analysis, planning and widespread appreciation for the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system.
46. The repositioning envisaged: (i) the revitalised, strategic, flexible, results and action-oriented Cooperation Framework as the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country¹⁹; and (ii) that United Nations Country teams deliver shared results in response to the priorities set out in the Cooperation Frameworks. However, preliminary findings of the evaluation on: (i) the practice of United Nations entity country programme derivation from Cooperation Frameworks; (ii) United Nations Country Team configuration exercises; (iii) the guidance, tools, and support systems developed and used to support the implementation of Cooperation Frameworks show a significant gap between operational realities and the strategic intent of the frameworks. The evaluation considers that the Cooperation Frameworks have not yet become “the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country”. Similarly, United Nations Country Teams have not yet significantly “re-configured” in line with Cooperation Framework priorities. The system-wide scope of the evaluation provides a holistic analysis of the internal and external factors that have supported or hindered progress in these areas of the development system repositioning which indicates that changes to incentives and accountabilities are necessary to bridge this gap.
47. SWEO is working to develop feasible and actionable recommendations with the aim to support UNSDG consideration. Areas of recommendations may include the Cooperation Framework guidance and the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF). The evaluation provides evidence to support broader Member State deliberations on reform of the development system.

System-wide evaluation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

48. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), launched in 2019, aims to strengthen disability inclusion across programmes and operations and enable the United Nations system to better support Member States in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), their achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.
49. Its evaluation, the first system-wide evaluation on disability inclusion in the United Nations system, was launched in 2024 for completion in mid-2025. The evaluation is global in scope to assess implementation of the Strategy from 2019 to 2025, to contribute to accountability and learning on disability inclusion in the United Nations and to inform key processes and events in this area.

IV. Use of system-wide evaluation evidence: strengthening learning to accelerate progress across the Sustainable Development Goals

50. The SWEO seeks to strengthen learning and accountability to contribute to the acceleration of progress across the Sustainable Development Goals focused on key issues and activities that cannot be adequately addressed through existing accountability mechanisms or evaluation functions.
51. Key to using system-wide evaluation evidence is ensuring that system-wide evaluations meet potential user need from the outset; supported by consultative planning and management processes; and timely delivery of evaluation reports with relevant and targeted recommendations. Evaluations engage users in broad, system-wide reference groups and are supported by inter-agency management groups of UN entity evaluation offices.

¹⁹ A/RES/72/279 & A/RES/75/233

While maintaining independence, users and stakeholders are consulted in evaluation scoping and design, provided with early briefings on emerging results, and during the development of recommendations to lead to more practical, implementable, and owned solutions. Broad system-wide engagement and consultation adds complexity and requires time and resources but is essential for strengthening learning and accountability for collective development results and development system reform.

Management response and follow-up

52. Evaluation use is facilitated through effective management response and follow-up mechanisms to ensure implementation of the recommendations of evaluations.
53. In 2024, the Development Coordination Office (as UNSDG Secretariat) facilitated the preparation of the management response to the Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative which is published along with the evaluation report on the UNSDG and Spotlight Initiative websites.
54. Under the system-wide evaluation transitional arrangement, two evaluations were completed on the United Nations Development System Response to COVID-19²⁰ and of the Joint SDG Fund.²¹ These evaluations made forward-looking recommendations on strengthening aspects of the United Nations development system and management responses were published on the UNSDG website, alongside the evaluation reports.
55. In 2024, the Joint SDG Fund²² reported that all eight recommendations made by the evaluation had been implemented by February 2024 and highlighted the key changes undertaken in response to the evaluation:

Governance: restructuring of the Fund's Operational Steering Committee with more inclusive membership. At country level the role of Resident Coordinators in programme governance and operations was reinforced.

Strategy: the Fund's Strategy for 2023-2026 refined its value proposition, positioning the fund as the United Nations' global flagship driving the Sustainable Development Goal transitions.²³

Operations: the Fund moved to a more flexible rolling approach coupled with capacity support to enable quality joint programme design (supported by technical lead entities).

Partnerships and collaboration: the Fund reported efforts to strengthen synergies and collaboration with other global vertical funds (UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, Local2030 Coalition, and Global Accelerator).

Maximising use

56. A key area of focus in 2024 was to build understanding of the system-wide evaluation function, the mandate of the SWEO and ways of working, as well as to ensure accessible system-wide evaluation evidence on key platforms. This included strengthening engagement across the United Nations, with Member States and other partners.
57. Four briefings were provided to Member States on the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy and the work of the office. As mentioned above, SWEO also contributed to the 2024 *ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment* with OIOS on evaluation evidence related to UN development system reform.
58. SWEO provided synthesized evaluation evidence of the QCPR to support Member States' deliberations on a new QCPR cycle, adopted in the fall of 2024. Collaborating with DESA and DCO, the SWEO contributed to briefings on UN development system reforms and system-wide evaluation evidence, aiding Member States in formulating guidance for the next four years. SWEO also participated in the 2024 QCPR training series for Member States organized by UNITAR.

²⁰ *Evaluation of United Nations Development System Response to COVID-19*

²¹; *Evaluation of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund*

²² *Annual Report of the Joint SDG Fund, 2023*

²³ A/79/72-E/2024/12

59. A key priority is ensuring the use of system-wide evaluation evidence by UNSDG entities. SWEO provided briefings to UNSDG principals and to entity focal points. Communication and engagement with the Resident Coordinator system and UNCTs was facilitated by the Development Coordination Office.

Partnerships

60. SWEO regularly communicated with the Joint Inspection Unit and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), on ongoing work and future plans. SWEO is a member of the evaluation reference group for the OIOS evaluation of the Resident Coordinator system (January and December 2025), and OIOS is part of the evaluation management group for the UNDIS evaluation.
61. The SWEO actively contributes the United Nations Evaluation Group's, development of technical guidance, strengthening evaluation capacity, coordinating system-wide evaluation activities and promoting the use of system-wide evidence. In 2024, SWEO facilitated sessions on the system-wide evaluation function at the UNEG Evaluation Practice Exchange Annual General Meeting. SWEO played an active role in the UNEG Evaluation Synthesis Working Group and contributed to redesigning the UNEG website, providing insights from the AI assisted evidence mapping initiative to improve accessibility and use of the UNEG evaluation database.
62. SWEO collaborated with the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition, co-chaired by UNDP and UNICEF evaluation offices, to enhance the Coalition's work by synthesizing existing evaluative evidence and making it more accessible to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
63. The SWEO, in collaboration with the Republic of Malawi, United Kingdom and the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition, led a side event for the Summit of the Future Action Days on using evidence, science, and digital technologies to accelerate progress towards Agenda 2030. The event announced major new investments in AI-supported evidence synthesis to improve how evidence is produced and used to address economic and societal challenges.
64. To promote broader cooperation and disseminate learning from system-wide evaluation activities, SWEO expanded its global partnerships, including with the UNSSC, MOPAN Secretariat, OECD DAC Evaluation Network, Nordic + Evaluation Group, and multi-lateral and regional development banks.
65. SWEO launched pages on the UN Secretariat's internal website (iSeek) and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) website and began work on a UN.org site which will feed into a dedicated section for the office on the UNSDG website. The full repository of evaluation reports is available on the UNEG and UNSDG websites. SWEO Contributions were published in OIOS Evaluation newsletters and the Islamic Development Bank's Sustainable Development Goals Digest.

V. Resourcing of the System-Wide Evaluation Office

66. The General Assembly, in its resolution 79/226, re-emphasized the importance of independence, credibility and effectiveness for the functioning of the SWEO. The Secretary-General emphasised in his 2024 report (A/79/72 – E/2024/12) that stable funding through regular resources for the SWEO is crucial to upholding its independence, transparency and key function in supporting learning and improvement in the United Nations development system. Adequate and predictable funding is a fundamental requirement in this regard and is crucial for efficiency and effectiveness, in particular for the recruitment and retention of staff with specialized skills and experience.

Financial resources

67. The estimated total budget requirement for 2024 was USD 2.4 million.
68. In 2024, a total of USD 1.54 million was received in extra-budgetary contributions through the trust fund established by the Secretary-General. SWEO also received in-kind contributions of USD 80,562 to support

the implementation of specific activities. Table 2 provides a breakdown of extrabudgetary, and in-kind resources received since 2023 by donor and United Nations entities.

69. Contributions from Denmark and Switzerland provided start-up funding for the work of the office. Contributions from United Nations entities were tightly earmarked to specific evaluation activities, which constrained operational flexibility. In addition, UNFPA seconded a P-5 Senior Evaluation Officer, under a non-reimbursable loan arrangement.

Table 2 Extrabudgetary contributions received 2023 – 2024

(United States Dollars)

<i>Donor/Entity</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>2024 in-kind</i>
DCO		200,000	
Denmark	218,765		
EOSG		499,893	
IFAD			60,562
Spotlight Initiative		360,000	
Switzerland	312,981	225,989	
UNDP	20,000	50,000	
UNESCO		2,140	
UNHCR			20,000
UNICEF		100,000	
WFP	20,000	100,000	
Total	571,746.00	1,538,022.00	80,562.00

70. As per financial planning, commitments and expenditures were made against the contributions received up to the end of 2024 to fund the SWEO staff positions and related operating expenses in addition to travel. Table 3 below provides a detailed report of SWEO's expenditures in 2023 and 2024. All funds were committed and disbursed within their individual grant validity dates.

Table 3 Expenditures 2023 and 2024

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Object of expenditure</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>
Posts	352.6	546.2
Consultants	0	638.2
Travel of staff	13.4	14.9
Contractual services	1.2	5
General operating expenses	13.8	19.8
Furniture and equipment	1.8	2.9
Other	49.8	66.3
Total	432.60	1,293.30

71. In addition, resources were made available from the Spotlight Initiative for the conduct of two Spotlight Initiative evaluation activities as follows: \$107,826 for the evaluability assessment of the Spotlight Initiative (completed in 2023) and \$767,716 for the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative (completed in 2024).

Human resources

72. In line with the Secretary-General's vision in A/72/684/-E/2018/7, SWEO is supported by a small team led by the Executive Director. In 2024, three posts were established: Senior Evaluation Advisor (P5), Evaluation Officer (P3), and Senior Administrative Assistant (GS7). All three posts are currently encumbered, including two supported by temporary secondments from UNFPA and WFP. A Junior Professional Officer will be assigned in the course of 2025.
73. SWEO evaluation officers primarily work to manage system-wide evaluations which are undertaken by teams of independent experts hired for specific assignments because the variety, complexity and specialized nature of different system-wide evaluation subjects requires SWEO to contract independent evaluation and subject matter specialists and experts to conduct evaluations. This model ensures that the office remains small, agile and responsive to emerging needs. It is widely used across United Nations evaluation functions.
74. In November 2024, SWEO and the Evaluation and Oversight Section (EOS) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) initiated a joint procurement process to establish a Long-Term Agreements for specialist evaluation services. Leveraging shared networks of specialized evaluation service suppliers through a joint solicitation process aligned requirements and streamlined processes to foster a more efficient and effective approach to resourcing evaluation services.

VI. 2025 programme of work and budget requirement

75. Table 4 sets out the programme of work for 2025, including the publication of two system-wide evaluations, the commencement of two new system wide evaluations in response, together with the piloting of follow up reviews to assess the impact of evaluations completed in 2022.
76. The UNSDG recommended SWEO to consider options for an initial evaluation, ideally in 2025, to assess whether and how the UN development system's support to key transitions in food systems transformation; energy transitions and access; digital connectivity; education and skills gaps; decent jobs and social protection accelerates SDG implementation. The aim is to inform future system-wide evaluations focused on achievements and results for the SDGs.
77. SWEO plans to launch an evaluation of the United Nations work on youth following a suggestion by the United Nations Youth Office. It will provide accountability and learning related to in the areas of sustainable development, human rights, and peace and security and to inform the implementation of Youth2030.

Table 4. Implementation status of on-going and planned evaluation activities 2025

#	Title	Status	Planned completion
1	System-wide evaluation on progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams	On-going	2025
2	System-wide evaluation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy	On-going	2025
3	System-wide evaluation - Youth	Planned	2026
4	System-wide evaluation of the UN development system's approach to the Six Transitions	Planned	2026
5	Evidence maps and summaries	Planned	2026

6	Follow up review of the evaluation of UNDS Socio-economic Response to Covid-19	Planned	2026
7	Follow up review of the evaluation of the Joint SDG Fund	Planned	2026

78. A key priority for SWEO is the further development of foundational guidance and systems in line with the provisions of the adopted policy for the system-wide evaluation function outlined in section II of this report.

79. The commencement of all planned activities is subject to the availability of resources.

80. To secure stable funding for the SWEO in 2025, the Secretary-General submitted a proposed programme budget setting out a total requirement of USD 3.4 million, comprising USD 2.7 million regular budget (for conversion of post and non-post resources) and USD 0.7 million extrabudgetary resources.

81. The General Assembly, in its resolution [79/257](#), endorsed the report of the Advisory Committee of Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/79/7), which had recommended against the proposed conversion of extrabudgetary resources to regular budget funding in 2025, noting that further explanation was needed on the complementarity of with United Nations oversight bodies and evaluation offices, and the scarcity of extrabudgetary resources.

82. In light of this decision, SWEO continues to be reliant on extra-budgetary resources and seeks to build upon the significant progress made in 2024 to broaden the funding base for its work through engagement with Member States and UNSDG entities.

83. SWEO has further revised its annual budget from USDG 3.04 million to USD 3.01 million in 2025; this includes USD 1.22 million for posts and USD 1.79 million for operational and related operational costs.

VII. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Evaluations

84. At the country level, mandatory evaluations of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework assess the UNCT's contribution to national development results and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, informing the design of subsequent Cooperation Framework cycles. These evaluations ensure accountability and support learning.

85. They are conducted in accordance with the guidelines for Cooperation Framework evaluations developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group and Development Coordination Office in 2021. The Development Cooperation Office facilitates and supports the conduct of independent, timely and useful Cooperation Framework evaluations.

86. As per the System-wide Evaluation Policy, SWEO will advise the Development Coordination Office on models and guidance for the system-wide evaluation function at country and regional levels, including the design and operationalization of evaluation quality assurance systems to support credible Cooperation Framework evaluations.

Planning and implementation

87. Cooperation Framework evaluations are commissioned and managed by the Resident Coordinator with the UNCT in the penultimate year of the cycle. DCO provides a global platform for the public dissemination of these evaluations and management responses.

88. The first cohort of new generation Cooperation Frameworks reached the penultimate year of their cycle in 2023. Table 5 indicates the status of the planned evaluations for 2023 and 2024 by country and region.

Table 5: Status of cooperation framework evaluations scheduled for 2023 and 2024 at 24/03/2025²⁴:

	2023		2024			
	Complete	Cancelled	Complete	Ongoing	Cancelled/postponed	
Africa	DRC Mali Sierra Leone	Djibouti Rwanda	Namibia	Cote D'Ivoire Ethiopia	Liberia South Africa Eswatini, Somalia Tunisia Uganda	Ghana, Sudan
Arab states	Iraq		Bahrain			Palestine Syria
Asia Pacific				Indonesia, Malaysia, Timor Leste	China	
Europe and Central Asia				Azerbaijan Kazakhstan North Macedonia Turkmenistan Bosnia and Herzegovina Serbia Uzbekistan Kosovo	Armenia Belarus Georgia Türkiye	
Latin America and Caribbean	Cuba Paraguay			Argentina Panama	Guatemala Mexico Uruguay	

89. In 2023, ten evaluations were planned, with eight completed. In 2024, 35 UNCTs reached the penultimate year of a cooperation framework or UNDAF cycle. 17 evaluations are completed, 14 are ongoing seven in the final reporting phase), and four are cancelled or postponed.

90. Reasons for cancelling or postponing Cooperation Framework evaluations include insecurity, ongoing crises or changes in the cycle duration. Two evaluations in 2023 were not conducted due to budget constraints.

²⁴ Source: UNCT reporting in UN-INFO and evaluation status tracking by DCO

Some UNCTs opted for reviews or rapid assessment instead, which are not considered as evaluations in the data and are not reflected in Table 5.

91. In 2025, 32 United Nations Country Teams will reach the penultimate year of a Cooperation Framework cycle. 26 evaluations are planned for completion, year while six have been cancelled or postponed for the reasons set out above.

Management response

92. Resident Coordinators, in collaboration with UNCTs, are responsible for preparing a management response to the Cooperation Framework evaluation and undertaking any follow-up action. Management responses are uploaded to UN-INFO as one of the key documents in the roadmap for the development of a new Cooperation Framework.
93. Six of the eight RC/UNCTs that completed Cooperation Framework evaluations scheduled for 2023 have uploaded a management response in UN-INFO.²⁵ Of the 15 UNCTs that had completed a 2024 Cooperation Framework evaluation by March 2025, six have uploaded a management response in UN-INFO.²⁶

Quality and use

94. Currently the quality and use of Cooperation Framework evaluations is not optimal due to limited financial resources and their broad scope and complexity. There is limited evidence that these evaluations inform the design of subsequent frameworks, mainly due to issues with timeliness, quality and level of ownership by the Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team. Although management responses are usually produced, they are not always publicly available, and accountability for acting on recommendations is weak.
95. The System-Wide Evaluation Policy clarifies roles and responsibilities in relation to Cooperation Framework evaluations with the aim of contributing to improvements in their quality and use. This includes independent external quality assessment once the evaluation report is finalized (post-hoc) managed by the SWEO (subject to the availability of resources) with the results reported annually.

VIII. Conclusion

96. 2024 marks the first full year of operations for the SWEO: demonstrating the value add of this unique function in assessing the contribution of the entire UN development system to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SWEO has advanced on a series of administration and evaluative matters, including releasing the UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Policy and a series of evaluations on key topics for the QCPR. Significant progress has been made in consolidating foundational elements of the SWEO as a stand-alone independent office providing leadership and strategic guidance for the system-wide evaluation function in accordance with this policy.
97. In 2025, SWEO will complete two system-wide evaluations and launch two new evaluations clearly demonstrating demand for its contribution to strengthened accountability, learning and improvement of the collective contribution of the United Nations development system to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
98. This report highlights the value and strategic importance of the work of the SWEO in meeting the expectations of Member States first affirmed in A/RES/64/289. It also underlines the critical need for stable and predictable resources. Despite the initial success, the scarcity of financial resources has hindered the ability of the office to provide evaluations at the pace intended and presents longer term concerns about the ability of the office to survive with limited voluntary resources.

²⁵ Cuba, Djibouti, Mali, DRC, Paraguay, Rwanda

²⁶ Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Panama, Timor-Leste Turkmenistan,