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9:00 – 12:00, 13:30 – 16:30

Agenda Item 6: Analysis of lessons learned for the Mid-Term Strategy

This note serves as a background document for Agenda Item 6: Analysis of lessons learned for the Mid-Term Strategy. The note provides an analysis of lessons learned which will help in preparation for the development of a new Mid-Term Strategy for the period 2022-2025.

Lessons of relevance to Strategic Planning and preparation of the 2022-2025 Medium Term Strategy and POW 2022-2023

The Evaluation Office has reviewed evaluations covering two MTS periods (2011-2014, 2015-18) to date to identify experiences and capture selected lessons that are relevant to UNEP's strategic planning processes. Some evaluation lessons from the past informed earlier strategic planning processes but, nevertheless, remain relevant for the forthcoming ones.

The following Evaluation Office reports have been used as a source of lessons of relevance to strategic planning and PoW preparation processes.

1. Evaluation of the Resource Efficiency Sub-Programme (2018)
2. 2016-2017 Biennial Evaluation Synthesis Report (2018)
3. Review Sub-Programme Coordination Function of UN Environment (2017)
4. The Formative Evaluation of the 2014-17 Medium Term Strategy (2015)
5. The Formative Evaluation of UNEP's Programme of Work 2011-2012 (2011)

Each lesson is referenced to the numbered source(s) above using superscripts.

Embedding Transformative Change in Sub-Programme Strategies¹

New pathways for transformative change often face difficulties competing with the existing mainstream (business as usual) systems. Sub-Programmes should actively consider how they will bring about breakthrough societal changes. Transition management advocating disruptive strategies for change can play a role in this setting, as part of the business model to catalyse effort at the beginning of a 'steep learning curve' and steward the work until a 'take-off' stage reached. Comparative advantages of UNEP such as technical expertise and its normative set-up can support these approaches.

Strengthening Theories of Change at Sub-programme level^{1,3,4,5}

Strengthen the Theory of Change of the Sub-Programmes so that they can better inform strategic thinking and operational planning by:

- Making longer term results levels in the TOC consistent with levels in existing Outcome Mapping
- Continue to establish strong alignment/links with SDGs
- Ensure causal pathways on the science-policy interface are properly articulated
- Incorporate thinking on disruptive innovation approaches
- Include communication and capacity building more explicitly within the Sub-programme TOC

Strengthen Results Statements^{3,4,5}

This important lesson has been regularly highlighted since 2012. However, it remains a challenge. Appropriate results levels and indicators for Expected Accomplishments^{4,5}

- Conformity of results statements with agreed definitions^{1,2,3,4,5}
- Recognise lengthy time lags between project approval/delivery and reporting of higher-level results at Expected Accomplishment level (requires consistent effort towards results over time)³
- Expected Accomplishments results statements must be attributable to UNEP's work. This requires that Expected Accomplishments are realistic in terms of UNEP's level of ambition, and

that the indicators to measure achievement against Expected Accomplishments allow for plausible attribution to UNEP^{4,5}

- Indicators need further improvement and should be objectively verifiable, similarly baseline indicator values should be supported by verifiable evidence.

Mechanism for reviewing Composition of Sub-programmes³

In order for UN Environment to remain responsive to global concerns, senior management should ensure there is a planned and agreed mechanism (possibly a policy presented to the UN Environment Assembly/CPR) for periodic review of the composition of sub-programmes and divisions in the longer term.

Strengthen the clarity of purpose, shared understanding of and approach to, the following key corporate issues:³

- Regional strategic presence, and how each Sub-Programme works with regional, sub-regional and country offices¹
- Communications at corporate, programme and project levels
- Knowledge management at corporate, programme and project levels
- Innovation and attitudes to risk in the UNEP PoW
- Resource allocation^{3,4,5}

Resource Allocation³

- The results-oriented culture in UN Environment is still developing and results-based approaches are currently more evident in strategic planning and reporting processes than in the resource allocation or financial management systems.
- While resource allocation processes vary depending on the source of funding, generic features that might be of help include:
 - clear decision-making criteria widely known in advance;
 - clarity around who/which body makes the final decision;
 - dissemination of the final outcome or selection and
 - explanations of why proposals were not selected.
- Resource allocation processes will be most effective if they take higher level results frameworks into consideration.

Reporting results³

- Enhanced by greater consistency in the formulation of appropriate PoW results indicators.
- Need a clear and consistent internal process for the verification and validation of baselines and reported results.
- Address weaknesses in the current system for reporting of higher-level results (inconsistency of in-house understanding of projects vs programmes – affects results reporting in centralised systems).

Strengthen Sub-Programme's Portfolio of Projects¹

Develop strong common narrative for the Sub-Programme that captures the programmatic intent and major pathways of change.

- Define the strategic niche of projects and create strong integration, linkages and synergies with related topics i.e. move from a portfolio of discrete (stand-alone) projects with a common theme to a coordinated programme of inter-dependent and synergistic interventions
- Experiment with limited number of transition arenas (alliances, frontrunners etc.)

Strengthen Project Designs^{1,2,4}

- Effectiveness there is a continued need for project designs and implementation actions to focus on, and invest more in, influencing the change processes that lead beyond project outputs and direct outcomes towards higher level results
- Sustainability of project outcomes and effects – project designs should place greater emphasis on creating the conditions that help to sustain their outcomes; clear strategies are needed (and should be a part of the project’s activities)
- Human Rights, Social Issues and Gender (pro-active approach in design, document/share successes)
- Capturing of baselines and monitoring systems that better inform results-oriented project management – promote the distinction between monitoring (for RBM) and reporting
- Results based budgeting
- Invest in the UNEP Quality Assurance function – a well-capacitated and independent Quality Assurance function can improve the quality of project design and increase the likelihood of implementation effectiveness without becoming a process bottleneck.

Finally, UNEP is contemplating a ‘transformational change’ that will also be embodied in its strategic planning documents and results frameworks of the 2022-2025 MTS. The Evaluation Office would like to highlight findings from a recent JIU Report on Change Management across the UN that flags some relevant and valuable lessons.

To improve the chances of success in organizational reform / high-level strategic planning:

- Clear and consistent direction “from the top”
- Ensure objectives are clear
- Engage with staff on what is being proposed and clearly explain why
- Involve people in the process
- Define a clear governance structure to ensure that relevant stakeholders can influence the process
- Develop a communications strategy around reform
- Equip staff for the change and support them through the process
- Outline “what is in it” for staff and what they will be expected to do differently
- Earmark resources to support the change process