

Guidance on integrating social and environmental standards into evaluations

UNFPA Evaluation Office
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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental – and the interrelationships among them. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030),¹ the Paris Agreement for Climate,² and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development³ all reinforce the call for coherent and integrated system-wide strategic solutions for protecting the planet and its natural and cultural resources. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)⁴ also underpins the importance of social and environmental safeguards and accountability measures for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

1 <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>.

2 <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

3 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=2051&menu=35>.

4 <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-guidance>

Responding to the call by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in December 2018, the United Nations system developed the [Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020-2030 - Phase I: Environmental sustainability in the area of management](#) (CEB/2019/1/Add.1); and [Phase II: Towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability](#) (CEB/2021/2/Add.1).

The strategies present a two-phased approach for achieving social and environmental sustainability across all functions of the United Nations system. The Sustainability Strategy Phase I calls on all United Nations entities to integrate and apply social and environmental safeguards into their programmes, with a target of 100 per cent of United Nations entities applying safeguards to their programmes by 2030. The Sustainability Strategy Phase II incorporates a more comprehensive sustainability strategy encompassing environmental and social sustainability dimensions in policies, programming and support functions.

UNFPA commitment to social and environmental standards

In keeping with relevant international conventions, agreements and normative frameworks, UNFPA took important steps to ensure that its programmes and operations comply with the social and environmental sustainability standards. Based on the [United Nations Model Approach to Environmental and Social Standards for United Nations Programming](#),⁵ and in accordance with the Chief Executive's Board for Coordination (CEB) decision (CEB2019/1/Add.1),⁶ UNFPA has developed Policy and Procedures for Implementation of UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards (SES) in Programming to ensure that there is no inadvertent harm on people and the environment caused by UNFPA programming, and to strengthen and mainstream sustainability and accountability in UNFPA programming in a systematic and comprehensive manner.⁷ This policy is complemented by the [UNFPA Climate Change Value Proposition](#) and the [UNFPA Environmental Efficiency Strategy](#) (EES) as part of UNFPA three pronged approach to environment and climate.⁸

Guiding principles of the UNFPA social and environmental standards



Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first



Human rights, gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment: ensuring gender-responsive approaches at all levels of programming



Sustainability and resilience: reducing risks and vulnerabilities and building resilience



Accountability: ensuring stakeholder engagement and accountability

⁵ The Model Approach represents a key step in moving towards a common approach among UN entities for addressing SES in programming, adopting a human rights-based approach that is transparent, inclusive and participative so that no one is left behind.

⁶ CEB decision - for all UN entities to develop and apply entity-specific safeguards in programming by 2030.

⁷ Policy and Procedures for Implementation of UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards in Programming, June 2022. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PROG_SES.pdf

⁸ The UNFPA EES contributes to individual and community resilience-building, systems strengthening, preparedness, early action and humanitarian response, and data for targeted action.

The UNFPA social and environmental standards identify benchmark standards in eight thematic areas, which provide a set of actions and recommendations to prevent and mitigate inadvertent harm to people and the environment. These are: (i) indigenous peoples; (ii) cultural heritage; (iii) community health and safety; (iv) climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction; (v) pollution prevention and resource efficiency; (vi) biodiversity, ecosystems and sustainable natural resource management; (vii) labour and working conditions; and (viii) displacement and involuntary resettlement.

In a nutshell, the social and environmental standards facilitate the early and systematic identification and assessment of social and environmental risks, and the management of these risks into programming.

The UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025 further strengthens and amplifies the attention to social and environmental standards through systematic mainstreaming of social and environmental sustainability in programming, preventing pollution, reducing the environmental footprint of its programmes and operations, and pursuing climate neutrality. To measure this, a specific indicator is introduced in the strategic plan integrated results and resources framework (IRRF) to gauge the extent to which country offices have applied environmental and social standards in programmes in line with United Nations standards.

What is the rationale for this guidance note?

The UNFPA social and environmental standards incorporate a human rights-based approach to programming. They also apply a risk-informed approach to addressing social and environmental risk and impacts to achieve sustainable programming outcomes. For maximum outcome, the social and environmental standards need to be embedded and applied at all steps of programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.⁹

In accordance with the evaluation policy, the Evaluation Office has made a concerted effort to ensure that important social issues pertaining to human rights, equity, gender equality, disability inclusion, and leaving no one behind (LNOB) are integrated into evaluation processes, guidelines, tools and systems. Similarly, with this guidance note, the Evaluation Office aims to strengthen the integration of social and environmental standards, especially the environmental ones, into evaluations.

The stocktaking by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Working Group on Integrating Environmental and Social Impact into Evaluations¹⁰ echoes this view in its observation that environmental aspects appear to have been inadequately covered in most evaluations by UNEG members. In response to this, the Environmental and Social Impact (ESI) Working Group, of which UNFPA is a member, is in the process of developing a guidance that would help UNEG members effectively address social and environmental standards in evaluations.

While this system-wide guidance is expected to provide a cohesive and coherent framework, the Evaluation Office is taking a progressive step to lay the foundation for the integration of social and environmental standards into both centralized and decentralized evaluations. This guidance offers examples of integrating social and environmental standards into evaluations rather than prescriptive standards. The guidance will be revisited and revised, as necessary, in view of the upcoming UNEG guidance on integration of social and environmental standards into evaluations.

⁹ Policy and Procedures for Implementation of UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards in Programming, June 2022. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PROG_SES.pdf

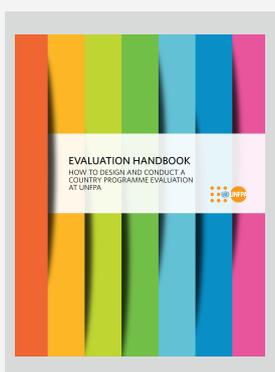
¹⁰ <https://www.gefio.org/events/unegepe-2021>.

What does this guidance offer?

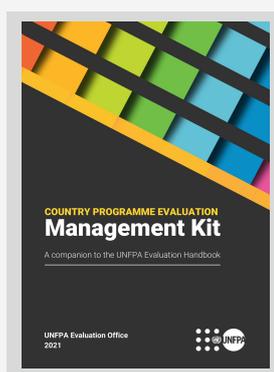
The main aim of this guidance is to encourage evaluation managers and evaluators to dedicate attention to environmental standards as a cross-cutting issue along with other essential social dimensions such as gender equality, human rights, and disability inclusion. The guidance offers some examples of how to mainstream social and environmental standards into evaluation processes, approaches and evaluation questions in conformity with the four UNFPA social and environmental standards guiding principles.

Correspondingly, by integrating social and environmental standards into evaluation questions, the guidance will strengthen the evidence base on how UNFPA programmes and operations have minimized and potentially mitigated the adverse effect of social and environmental effects beyond the “do no harm” principle. This is critical to inform and ultimately contribute to strengthening the quality of interventions by maximizing benefits to stakeholders involved and to promote efficient programming in order to accelerate progress towards the three transformative results.¹¹

UNFPA has developed explicit guidance and tools for the integration of social dimensions such as human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB into evaluations. Current guidelines and checklists address in greater depth the mainstreaming of social dimensions and principles into evaluations. The present guidance should therefore be used as a complement, specifically dedicated to the environmental dimension, to the existing UNFPA guidelines on evaluations such as the following:



[Evaluation Handbook: How to design and conduct a country programme evaluation at UNFPA](#)



[Country Programme Evaluation Management Kit](#)



[Guidance on disability inclusion in UNFPA evaluations](#)



[Guidance on integrating the principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind in UNFPA evaluations](#)

What are the key dimensions to consider?

Social and environmental standards should be considered cross-cutting concern across all phases of the evaluation (preparatory, design, data collection, analysis and reporting, dissemination, communication and facilitation of use phases). Integration of social and environmental standards should be applied to all programmes, including those without explicit environmental objectives.

¹¹ Ending preventable maternal deaths, ending unmet need for family planning, and ending gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child marriage.

1. Integration of social and environmental standards into the evaluation process

Below are specific examples of elements to be addressed in each phase of evaluations.

Phase of evaluation	Elements to address	Explanation	Other considerations	Checklist to ensure SES are integrated into different phases of the evaluation
	The terms of reference (ToR) of evaluations should address SES in a meaningful way	The ToR should provide a reflection of the contextual factors of the intervention and the social and environmental effects, including a lens to examine the disproportionate impacts of climate-induced vulnerabilities on women and girls, as well as other populations in vulnerable or marginalized situations	Environmental standards should be mainstreamed into the evaluation questions, methods, data collection, and analysis and reporting. The evaluation scoping exercise is an opportunity to assess how an evaluation can best address SES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does the evaluation include SES in overall evaluation including contextual analysis? ✓ Does the evaluation theory of change include attention to SES? ✓ Does the evaluation matrix (evaluation questions, assumptions and indicators), take into account SES issues? ✓ Does the contextual analysis include SES and their interplay with the three UNFPA transformative results? ✓ Does the design and implementation of the evaluation methodology follow ethical standards for evaluators and take into account and plan for the specific social and environmental dimensions of the context? ✓ Does the evaluation raise question/s about the environmental effects (intended and unintended) of interventions towards the three transformative results?
	Evaluation team	The evaluation team should collectively bring expertise to examine possible social and environmental impacts towards the three transformative results of UNFPA		
Preparatory phase Design/ inception phase	Evaluation questions should address SES, where appropriate (see section 2)	The evaluation questions should reflect inclusion of social and environmental sustainability		
	SES within evaluation practice	<p>All evaluations should apply the 'do no harm' principle, including appropriate safeguards to avoid inadvertent harm to the stakeholders consulted during the evaluation process</p> <p>In conformity with UNFPA environmental targets and objectives, all evaluations in UNFPA should take concrete measures to reduce their environmental footprint, including reduction of international air travel for country missions, where possible</p>		
	Stakeholder engagement	Ensure full and effective stakeholder engagement, especially by the most vulnerable groups in support of accountability and decision-making processes including making the complaints and grievance mechanism easily accessible to all stakeholders	Incorporating stakeholder perspectives especially those of the most vulnerable groups to potential climate change impacts and disaster risks	
Data collection phase	Data collection	Evaluations should collect information and evidence on the direct and indirect effects of interventions. This includes assessment of the adaptive capacity of UNFPA and its contribution to resilience-building, systems-strengthening, preparedness, early action and humanitarian response. Adequate attention should also be paid to identifying and addressing vulnerability of marginalized and disadvantaged groups to potential climate change impacts and disaster risks, including by ensuring their participation in decisions		

Phase of evaluation	Elements to address	Explanation	Other considerations	Checklist to ensure SES are integrated into different phases of the evaluation
Analysis and reporting phase	Analysis and reporting phase	Evaluations should assess the direct and indirect effects of interventions, or the potential and actual environmental impact of interventions on the achievement of UNFPA transformative results. This includes how climate change interferes with UNFPA transformative results and the degree of UNFPA ability to reduce risks and vulnerability and build resilience by integrating SES considerations into all aspects of country programming		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does the report include findings and analysis on SES as agreed in the ToR? If not, is there a satisfactory justification for their non-inclusion? ✓ Does the report include conclusions on SES that are adequately supported by the findings? If not, is it because the findings constitute insufficient evidence, or because the analysis on the SES was omitted? ✓ Does the report include recommendation(s) related to SES that are based on conclusions?
Facilitation of use and dissemination phase	Guided by the UNFPA Strategy to enhance evaluation use through communications and knowledge management (2022-2025) , evaluations should use diversified and innovative ways of dissemination by reducing the printing of evaluation publications			

2. Integration of environmental standards into evaluation questions

Existing UNFPA guidelines and checklists address in greater depth the mainstreaming of social dimensions and principles into evaluations. The following table therefore offers examples of how to integrate environmental dimensions into relevant evaluation criteria. These examples are meant to be illustrative and should be carefully adapted to the context of the evaluation.

Evaluation criterion: **Relevance**

Example

- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA programmes or interventions identified and addressed vulnerability of people to potential climate change impacts and disaster risks?
- ✓ To what extent have the potential and actual environmental impact of interventions and the disproportionate impacts of climate-induced vulnerabilities on women and girls been analysed and duly taken into programme design?
- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA programmes adapted to the rapidly changing mega-trends,¹² including climate change?

Evaluation criterion: **Effectiveness**

Example

- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA-supported interventions contributed to reducing the risks that have resulted from climate-related loss or change of livelihoods?

Evaluation criterion: **Efficiency**

Example

- ✓ To what extent has the management of programmes and operations minimized the environmental footprint of UNFPA?
- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA programmes and operations instituted mechanisms to manage, mitigate and minimize social and environmental risks and impacts to achieve the three transformative results?

¹² Mega-trends such as humanitarian crises, people on the move, inequalities, demographic change etc.

Evaluation criterion: **Sustainability**

Example

- ✓ To what extent have UNFPA programmes and operations fostered social and environmental sustainability?

Evaluation criterion: **Coordination**

Example

- ✓ To what extent has UNFPA contributed to strategically positioning SES in United Nations Country Team (UNCT) coordination mechanisms?

