

## Evaluation Brief

# Enhanced capacity for measuring progress towards the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals 2020-2023

**UNEP EARLY WARNING AND ASSESSMENT  
DIVISION**

**March 2024**

## EVALUATION BRIEF

This is the summary of the Terminal Review (TR) of the project '*Enhanced capacity for measuring progress towards the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals*' (the project).

### Background to Project

The project's main objective was to strengthen national capacity for designing coherent and integrated policies for sustainable development, monitoring and reporting on the environmental dimension of the SDGs, and focused on:

- Enhancing capacity on environment statistics through training programmes at the regional level;
- Ensuring dissemination and uptake of the global methodologies through targeted capacity development for key SDG indicators at national levels; and
- Deepening UN Environment's analysis of trends at the global and regional levels, including interlinkages between the various goals, targets, and indicators.

The project was implemented between 30 July 2020 and 31 December 2023, with a total planned budget of USD 1,502,672, of which the European Commission contributed USD 1,294,700 and the UN contributed (in-kind) USD 208,000. The project was implemented by UNEP's Early Warning and Assessment Division, together with implementing partners UNITAR and the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP).

### Scope of Evaluation

In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy and the UNEP Programme and Project Management Manual, the TR was undertaken at operational completion of the project to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The TR had two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among a target audience that includes UNEP, the European Commission and the relevant agencies of the project participating countries.

### Key findings

Based on the key TR criterion, the key findings are:

**Strategic Relevance:** The TR showed that the project was highly relevant and well suited to the priorities and policies of the main donor - European Commission, the implementing regions (Africa and Asia) and countries (6 target countries), and the target beneficiaries. The project was also relevant to UNEP's mandate and its alignment with UNEP's policies and strategies at the time of project approval. **Overall review rating: Highly Satisfactory.**

**Project Design:** The project design was satisfactory and is part of the UNEP CPR approved 715.1 project: *Informing policy through strengthening national, regional and global data and indicator frameworks and integrated analysis on the environmental dimension of the Agenda 2030* and works towards the same outcome as the project under review. **Overall review rating: Satisfactory.**

**Effectiveness including availability of Outputs, achievement of the outcome and likelihood of impact:** There were two output components supported by several activities and linked results and milestones, and a full set of documentary evidence of the project's outputs was available. The project's planned targets - outputs and outcome were achieved, and exceeded, through an additional 8 activities and associated outputs and milestones, all supported by project documents, project deliverables, the project's progress reports, the

project's website and the final project report. Several quality documents in the Measuring Progress series were published, and technical assistance in six target countries for the target SDG indicators helped to equip them with the necessary statistical capacity to report and disseminate on these SDG indicators. The main outcome of the project was also achieved and there is a high likelihood of impact. **Overall review rating: Satisfactory.**

**Efficiency:** The project planned to finish on 31 December 2022, however it was extended to 31 December 2023, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A no-cost extension was approved, and 8 complimentary activities were added to the existing project, at no-extra cost, and by using cost-effective approaches, exceeded the originally planned project targets. **Overall review rating: Highly Satisfactory.**

**Financial management:** Overall, financial management was highly satisfactory with compliance with UNEP's financial policies and procedures, review procedures and the expenditure were within the revised budget. There was completeness of financial information. The project incurred a financial expenditure of 1,242,912 USD out of the 1,294,700 USD project budget, giving an expenditure of 96%, with 100% of project activities completed. **Overall review rating: Highly Satisfactory.**

**Monitoring and reporting:** The project included an adequate monitoring plan and the progress reporting addressing how the project addressed challenges, i.e. COVID-19 and its mitigation, as well as progress towards achieving the outputs and outcome indicators was well developed and disseminated. **Overall review rating: Satisfactory.**

**Sustainability:** There appears to be a strong ownership, interest, and commitment among UNEP to sustain results in the future, with direct examples of such. Additional funding is required however, to achieve the project outcome fully. Institutional structures seem to be largely in place regarding reporting on the environmental SDGs and for those SDGs not reported, mechanisms to develop the data needed to report on SDGs is planned in several countries, i.e. for the waste sector. Partnerships at the UN level have been established on the project subject, including UN Statistics Division (UNSD), UNITAR and the UN SIAP. **Overall review rating: Likely.**

**Factors Affecting Performance:** Preparation and readiness were satisfactory, with a slight delay in the start of the project and the need to use virtual means in its implementation at the beginning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a high degree of project management and supervision. At the beneficiary level, there were some logistical issues that emerged in some countries, and as a result it is recognised that planning of workshops is required well in advance. The use of SDG focal points at both regional and national levels, via for example the UN Regional Offices also assisted the project management in the implementation of the project. Stakeholder cooperation was deemed to be effective and participatory at both regional and national levels. The project delivered extensive communication and visibility/public awareness actions, including a project web page and numerous publications, online and in-person events. Gender inclusive measures were included in the project's implementation, with a good gender balance of the project team and at the beneficiary level. **Overall review rating: Highly Satisfactory.**

**Nature of External Context:** The project during its implementation did not experience any conflicts or political upheavals, however its operations were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. From the evidence in the progress reports, final report and from the interviews, the impact from COVID-19 was largely mitigated using virtual and re-planning of activities, as well as additional activities. **Overall review rating: Moderately Unfavourable.**

## Conclusions

The project was very relevant, both in context of the main donor, the European Commission and UNEP's mandate and its alignment with their policies and strategies, together with a satisfactory design.

The 41-month project was managed efficiently, with sound financial management and reporting, by a dedicated project team led by UNEP, with supporting partners UNITAR and UN SIAP, which needed one no-cost extension due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project's main targets - outputs and outcome were exceeded, through an additional 8 activities with linked outputs. Several key documents in the 'Measuring Progress' series were developed and published, and six countries extended their capacities in target SDG indicators and equipped them with the necessary statistical capacity to report and disseminate on these indicators.

Countries still need more support in the process of data collection and there is a specific weakness in data availability and hence reporting in the waste sector in the project's case hazardous waste and the national recycling rate. Overall, there is high degree of likelihood of impact.

It is considered that sustainability is likely, with a strong ownership, interest, and commitment among UNEP to sustain results in the future, albeit with the need for additional funding. Institutional structures seem to be largely in place regarding reporting on the environmental SDGs and for those SDGs not reported, mechanisms to develop the data needed to report on SDGs is planned in several countries, i.e. waste.

Stakeholder cooperation was deemed to be effective and participatory at both regional and national levels, and the project delivered extensive communication and visibility/public awareness actions.

Gender inclusive measures were included in the project's implementation, with a good gender balance of the project team and at the beneficiary level.

The project demonstrates performance at the **'Highly Satisfactory'** level.

## **Lessons Learned**

Lesson 1: Improve the quality of the data collection and reporting.

Lesson 2: Institutional arrangements, structures and working relationship between UNEP, the main beneficiaries, and the implementing partners.

Lesson 3: Flexible project implementation and management.

Lesson 4: High quality and effective dissemination and visibility products.

Lesson 5: Planning of capacity building activities.

Lesson 6: The mix between virtual and face to face capacity building and knowledge exchange.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: Secure additional funding for continuing support to target countries.

Recommendation 2: Reporting on the selected (target) SDG indicators will require institutionalisation of the process to compile information for countries.

Recommendation 3: Support on methodology to compile data on the SDG indicator 8.4.1/12.2.1 - Material Footprint.

Recommendation 4: Support governments to strengthen the level of participation to ensure a higher level of participation of all inter-agencies concerned in environmental dimension of SDGs.

Recommendation 5: Enhance baseline data collection to allow the analysis of waste generation and recycling (i.e. hazardous waste, municipal recycling, etc.) to be able to report on related SDGs.

Recommendation 6: Showcasing project achievements.