

# **UN-REDD Programme Formative Review**

## **Final Report**

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# 1 Introduction and background

UN-REDD is currently preparing a strategy for the period between 2026 – 2030. The work plan for the development of this strategy envisages a number of concrete steps designed to solicit inputs from stakeholders within and beyond UN-REDD. As part of this unfolding process, an externally facilitated process to undertake a formative review of the UN-REDD programme was commissioned. The formative review and lessons-learning process is presented and described in this document.

The formative review ran concurrently with the UN-REDD strategy development process, beginning in April and ending in October 2024. This document presents the main findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations from the formative review.

## 2 Objectives, purpose and approach

### 2.1 Objectives and scope

The formative review and lesson learning process was designed with the goal of soliciting experiences to date, lessons learned, approach, process and overall contribution. This is deliberately different from a more summative, impact evaluation designed to assess overall performance against original workplan and targets. The review was conducted by an external, independent consultant engaged by and reporting to the UN-REDD Secretariat in Geneva.

The overall objective of the formative review is to:

- undertake a formative review of the UN-REDD programme to date and to make recommendations on how to maximise its future contributions and support over the period 2026 – 2030.

The scope of the review covers the whole period of UN-REDD operations, from 2009 to present. Three broad phases of support have been in effect over this period: i) 2009 – 2015; ii) between 2015 and 2020 and iii) Post 2020

Specifically, the review is intended to:

- assess the relevance, contribution and added value of UN-REDD support to climate mitigation processes at country, regional and global levels;
- review the overall theory of change of UN-REDD and its links to the wider national and international REDD+ process and the degree to which this theory of change has been validated;
- assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the support provided by UN-REDD, particularly from the country perspective, recognizing the joint responsibility for implementation, shared between UN-agencies and country counterparts;
- based on evidence collected, present key recommendations regarding how to enhance the future role and contribution of UN-REDD in the period 2026 – 2030, for inclusion within the UN-REDD Strategy development process

### 2.2 Evaluation questions

Evaluation questions in this review are presented below by Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Question
<b>Relevance and design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To what degree has UN-REDD (through its overall contribution, including various models of implementation ranging from core UN-REDD to associated/anchored to agencies interventions) been able to</li></ul>

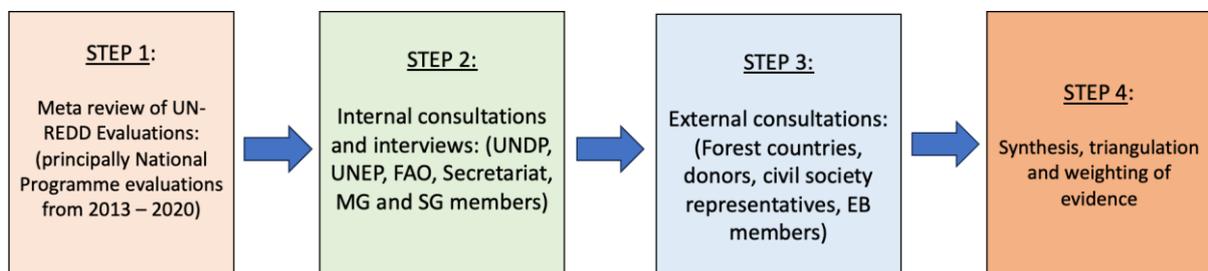
maintain its overall relevance at country, regional and global level, given the fast-changing and evolving landscape for REDD+?

- How adaptive and responsive has UN-REDD been to evolving country-level needs and to what degree has the theory of change and results framework responded to external changes to maintain relevance?
- To what degree has the UN-REDD theory of change (ToC) been realised; have the underlying assumptions held true and what implications might this have for the future programme? With the elements of the post-2025 TOC being developed the review will cover both the earlier programs assumptions and assess draft ToC assumptions for post-2025.

<b>Coherence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree has UN-REDD support been coherent with other forms of REDD+ support provided at country level</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What aspects of UN-REDD support have been effective and what aspects have been less effective across the different phases of support provided since 2009 and why?</li> <li>• What is the niche of UN-REDD support to date?</li> <li>• To what degree has UN-REDD been effective in mobilising and soliciting inputs and contributions from non-state actors such as private sector, civil society and IPLCs?</li> <li>• How have governance and decision-making structures within UN-REDD performed at national and global levels. How effective and inclusive have they been?</li> <li>• What modalities of support have been more effective? (NP, TS, TA)</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How efficient and co-ordinated has UN-REDD support at country level been?</li> </ul>
<b>Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have been the most significant impacts or results generated by UN-REDD at national and international levels?</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can UN-REDD play an incisive role in the future based on experience and track-record to date?</li> </ul>

### 2.3 Approach and phasing

The review was designed in four distinct phases, or steps as presented in Figure 1



**Figure 1:** The three phases of the formative review

#### Step 1: Document Review

The first stage consisted of a desk-review of previous evaluations of UN-REDD. The full list of documents reviewed is presented in Annex 1. Documents reviewed included:

- country-level evaluations of UN-REDD National Programmes from 2013 to 2020, (including a report by UN-REDD providing a synthesis of key findings evaluations conducted up to 2016)
- a 2014 evaluation of UN-REDD programme,
- a 2017 appraisal of the UN-REDD programme of work
- a 2020 report on best practices and lessons learned by UN-REDD.
- a 2023 evaluation of EU collaboration with UN agencies (including UN-REDD)

In addition, interviews were held with two evaluators of National Programmes (who had both undertaken multiple reviews in different countries) and a third interview was undertaken with the consultant who reviewed UN-REDD as part of the 2023 EU Evaluation.

### Step 2: Internal consultations

The second phase of the formative review consisted of interviews with key persons working in the three implementing agencies (UNDP, UNEP and FAO) as well as UN-REDD Secretariat staff. In general interviews were held with around three persons at one go (for example, combining thematic or regional experts) over a one-hour period. Given the relatively short time and the number of persons in each sitting, it was not possible to cover all the questions in the Thematic Review Concept Note. As such, the discussion was selective, targeting questions that were considered most relevant to those being interviewed. An interview was also held with an ex-UNDP Regional Staff member who worked for many years in the SE Asia regional office and who has now moved to GCF.

### Step 3: External consultations

The third and final phase of the formative review consisted of interviews conducted with external stakeholders. This included forest countries who had been direct beneficiaries and partners to UN-REDD, either through National Programme support or other modalities such as Technical Assistance and Targeted Support. Secondly, key donor agencies were interviewed who were currently or had previously supported the programme. Finally, civil society representatives from the Executive Board were interviewed (including those representing Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities).

### Step 3: Synthesis, triangulation and weighting of evidence

Following the inputs from each of these three steps, the overall findings were synthesised and triangulated to establish the main lines of evidence and used to inform this report. Evidence from the three sources was weighted differently when coming to final conclusions. Of greatest significance were the inputs given through the external consultations (given the fact that most of the respondents were beneficiaries and partners of the programme and their observations were seen as having greatest legitimacy and independence). Secondly, the findings from the external reviews were considered important, but it was recognised that the findings had to be considered within the time and programmatic context that existed when they were reported. Finally, inputs from the implementing agencies were ranked third in terms of importance and were used mostly to validate findings coming from other sources, rather than as independent sources of evidence in themselves.

There have been regular and frequent opportunities with which to inform the ongoing UN-REDD Strategy development process. The consultant leading the formative review presented initial findings (from the first two phases) to the UN-REDD Management Group retreat, held in Geneva on 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> June and a presentation of review findings was made to the UN-REDD Executive Board in Rome on 3<sup>rd</sup> October. Regular, informal interactions between the consultant and the team responsible for preparing the strategy also ensured that key findings were fed in to the drafting process in real time.

## 3 Key findings

### 3.1 Relevance and coherence

Overall, the review found that UN-REDD has been and remains highly relevant to the needs of forest countries. Support in the 2010s was instrumental in supporting countries reach readiness and establishing the four pillars under the Warsaw Framework. UN-REDD was able to provide “foundational” support to countries, by raising awareness and understanding of REDD+ and then supporting them to build capacity, systems and structures for REDD+ readiness. The review found that there are high levels of coherence (and low duplication) between support provided by UN-REDD and other forms of bilateral or multi-lateral support. Given the sharp focus on supporting UNFCCC processes, UN-REDD is widely seen as “neutral” and not being associated with any particular institutional mechanism or process, beyond UNFCCC.

Over the past decade and a half, there have been significant changes in the external operating environment and countries are trying to navigate a path through these forms of support. UN-REDD has been instrumental in helping forest countries interpret, understand and navigate this complexity. However, it has been less agile in working with private sector approaches and technical assistance providers. In recent years, the drivers of deforestation in many countries have shifted from forest-related aspects to wider considerations of agriculture and land-use change. This is an area that UN-REDD will need to navigate in its next phase of support.

The review identified a few gaps relating to overall relevance. Firstly, although UN-REDD has been highly valued by forest agencies in many countries, it has been less successful in engaging non-forest government agencies that intersect with REDD+. This includes ministries of finance and planning, agriculture and rural development. Secondly, while support from UN-REDD has had a strong focus on the technical aspects of REDD+, it has been less successful in addressing the broader political economy aspects of REDD+ (such as barriers and enablers to real transformational change). Thirdly, UN agencies expressed a concern regarding the risk of being seen to support specific initiatives (such as LEAF) and the risk that this generates in terms of compromising the demand-driven nature of the programme and the “neutrality” of individual UN agencies. Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

#### **Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- Overall UN-REDD has been very relevant, despite the fact that there has been a significant evolution in the external environment and consequently changes in the needs and demands of participating countries
- UN-REDD support has been foundational - helping with underlying issues such as capacity and understanding, REDD+ building blocks and general readiness. The achievements realised have allowed countries to better access more specific forms of support - such as Results Based Finance
- UN-REDD support has been important as it didn't come with "baggage" - it was linked back to UNFCCC and not any particular set of standards or programme goals (FCPF, GCF, ART-Trees)
- Support was demand-driven. Agenda was set by participating countries - able to strategically support areas that were not supported by others.

#### **Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- Overall, support from UN-REDD has been very relevant and valued by forest countries. The programme addresses core challenges of national capacity, builds understanding and skills of REDD+ readiness and addresses deforestation which is key in many countries.
- Need to ensure that project design and support goes beyond the forest sector to other government agencies.
- UN-REDD programmes designed with focus on supporting countries achieve REDD+ readiness under the Warsaw Framework, but less

- Although total level of funding support has not been as high as other programmes and donors, the support has been strategic and targeted
- Overall, UN-REDD support has been very coherent with other forms of bilateral and multi-lateral support being received by participating countries
- Country needs have grown and diversified and UN-REDD needs to be able to respond to these new priorities: Agriculture and land-use; carbon markets, biodiversity, adaptation and environmental services
- Initially, UN-REDD and FCPF were the only ‘shows in town’. UN-REDD has been good in ensuring overall coherence as the playing field has become more crowded. However, in recent years, the emergence of private sector TA providers has made things more complicated, and UN-REDD has been less able to navigate this growing complexity

- real focus on broader political economy considerations that will drive (or constrain) overall viability of REDD+ and efforts to drive down deforestation.
- Concerns over the rigid and inflexible nature of National Programme support, when there was a need to adapt the design in response to rapidly changing circumstances
  - Degree to which UN-REDD NPs linked and were coherent with other forms of readiness support varied significantly from country to country. This was also related to wider links to other initiatives supporting broader forest governance reforms.

### 3.2 The theory of change

The UN-REDD programme theory of change (ToC) was developed in the early 2010s to guide its overall development. Since this time, the external operating environment in which REDD+ operates has changed significantly. Consequently, the initial assumptions made at the start of UN-REDD need to be revisited when re-drafting an updated ToC. Firstly, the time taken to achieve readiness was significantly longer than initially anticipated, due to the complexity of REDD+ and the limited capacity in many of the forest countries. Individual countries have progressed at a significantly different pace than others due to the very different levels of capacity, finance and human resource availability found. Readiness is not (as originally envisaged), a discrete step with a clear beginning and end, rather it is an ongoing process that requires continuous attention and evolution. Capacity building at country level is a long and complex task and requires ongoing support to maintain relevance, given the fast-paced changes in the external operating environment and technology advances with regard to MRV and earth observation. Furthermore, it was widely assumed that once countries became ready for REDD+, results-based financing will be available in sufficient volumes to meet emerging supply from forest countries. This has not proven to be the case. Currently, the level of results-based finance is not sufficient to meet national demands. Furthermore, there has been a proliferation of different mechanisms, standards and approaches in results-based finance for REDD+, which was not foreseen.

External consultations (particularly with donor country representatives) emphasised the need in the theory of change being developed for the period 2026 – 2030 to consider more clearly roles relating to TA provision as well as a clear presentation of UN-REDD’s preferred end-goal with regard to carbon markets and finance (see below)

#### **Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- Assumptions regarding capacity and pace of becoming ready for REDD+ proved incorrect.
- Results-based finance has materialized, but distributed across multiple programmes and in insufficient volume to meet the needs of forest countries

#### **Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- Initial assumptions about the time and resources needed to achieve REDD readiness were incorrect. Took longer and

- The new theory of change for UN-REDD includes support countries to access RB Financing as a vehicle to supporting scaling up of Emission Reduction Programmes. However, what is less clear is what is the end goal in the UN-REDD ToC? Is it a move towards a compliance market? Or expansion of voluntary market? Are instruments such as LEAF seen as interim? Is there a recognition that ODA is never going to be sufficient - and private capital and investment is needed but can be triggered through public money to reduce risk, develop tools and strategies?
- In the 2026 - 2030, it is not clear how TA will be provided to forest countries and who has comparative advantages in this area. And what is the role of private sector TA. There is an increasing proliferation of TA providers in the public and private sectors, but a concern that many of these providers are very transactional (geared towards specific standards, rather than more fundamental building of national capacity). UN-REDD can help to facilitate processes that clarify and reach agreement on TA provision

required greater levels of support and inputs.

- There has been a loss of momentum in some countries given the time taken to achieve readiness. Long-term political support is key.

### 3.3 Overall effectiveness

Views were solicited from external stakeholders regarding where UN-REDD had been more effective and conversely, where it had been less effective. Previous evaluations were reviewed for similar perspectives. Overall, there was a shared perception that UN-REDD had been highly effective in supporting countries to understand, internalise and implement the complexities of REDD+ as it developed and evolved, including the Warsaw Pillars of UNFCCC. As has been discussed in previous sections, one area where UN-REDD has been less effective to date, relates to its positioning with regard to the provision of technical assistance, given the growth and proliferation of other service providers in both public and private sectors.

#### **Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

##### More Effective:

- Helping countries understand, demystify and navigate the realities of REDD+ in the early days
- Delivering REDD readiness - building blocks, foundation for other lines of support
- Safeguards - translating general guidance from UNFCCC into practical implementation
- MRV and NFMS - FAO developed a number of tools, packages and training that could deliver complex requirements in conformity with UNFCCC requirements
- Helping countries leverage new forms of climate finance (RBPs)

##### Less Effective:

- Clarifying their role and comparative advantage in TA provision (particularly in the last 3-4 years). Conflicts with aim of 'invisibility'
- Very "fixed" approaches to some more technical aspects relating to forest monitoring and MRV, which sometimes conflicted with national approaches.

#### **Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

##### More effective

- REDD Secretariats have been a key factor in supporting REDD process in many countries - although sustainability remains an issue.
- Strong focus on technical readiness – MRV, FREL, SIS, NS/AP etc.

##### Less effective

- Lack of intersectoral linkages and limited country ownership beyond technical ministry
- Lack of awareness of external factors that can shape or sustain readiness process (political economy factors)

### 3.4 UN-REDD strengths and weaknesses

Key strengths associated with UN-REDD include the strong and clear links to the Warsaw Framework for REDD+ and the wider UNFCCC process; the fact that UN-REDD works at global, regional as well as national levels; support to south-to-south, peer-based learning, exchange and knowledge management; the strong and broad-based technical support offer provided from three different UN agencies; the forging of links between forest countries and results-based finance mechanisms and the engagement of non-state actors during readiness support. A key strength identified by UN-REDD donors is the programme's global reach – and its ability to create new relationships for donors outside existing bilateral relationships. Finally, the programme is recognised for its integration of gender, both at organisational levels (through the application of the UN-REDD Gender Marker<sup>1</sup>) and in the context of support to partner countries (through, for example, national gender strategies and the inclusion of gender goals within National REDD+ Strategies and Action Plans.

Weaknesses identified by the review include the apparent drop in engagement with non-state actors following completion of National Programmes (NPs); a perception from civil society regarding the “rush” towards RB finance and the risk of leaving non-state actors behind; weak engagement of private sector actors and limited engagement at a political level given UN-REDD's primary focus on technical solutions.

In terms of the modalities supported by UN-REDD over the past 15 years, National Programmes (NPs) were considered the most effective form of support. Funds were made available for engaging with a wide set of actors and implementing pilot actions on the ground. This was considered a very important goal when engaging actors in the REDD+ space and increasing understanding and awareness on REDD+ opportunities and risks. Technical assistance (TA) and Targeted Support (TS) were described by forest countries as being useful but tended to focus on specific problems and paid insufficient attention to ensuring national actors (inside and outside government) were supported to raise their capacity. However, when individual tasks were identified (such as preparing a project document for results-based finance), it was recognised as being very effective with a high quality of technical support provision. Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

#### **Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

##### Strengths

- Key strength has been support to Readiness (Warsaw Framework) - MRV, Safeguards in particular) and supporting countries access new forms of climate finance (RBP), as well as helping countries understand issues of governance, inclusion of non-state actors
- Key strength has been UN-REDD's ability to work at different levels of scale - global level (UNFCCC) and national level - helping interpret and translate general guidance from COPs to national initiatives
- Seen from the perspective of donors - UN-REDD provides access to a global initiative, access to collaboration and support to countries outside existing bilateral programmes
- Foundational support at the beginning of REDD+ enabled forest countries to get to a level where they could understand what REDD+ entailed and built some basic

#### **Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

##### Strengths:

- Strong technical focus and capacity of each UN agency
- South-South, peer-based learning
- Meeting requirements of Warsaw Framework for REDD+ (NS/AP, NFMS, FREL, Safeguards, MRV etc)
- Strong foundation for range of results-based funding programmes
- Strong PMUs and technical advisers

##### Weaknesses:

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.un-redd.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/UN-REDD\\_Gender\\_Marker\\_Info%20Brief%20%28303949%29.pdf](https://www.un-redd.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/UN-REDD_Gender_Marker_Info%20Brief%20%28303949%29.pdf)

capacity to be able to move forward, plan and take strategic decisions

- Gender mainstreaming across UN-REDD implementing agencies and in the context of country support

#### Weaknesses

- Concerns from civil society that initial strong focus on inclusion, supporting civil society and IPLC engagement has been replaced by a ‘rush’ towards leveraging external financing for RBPs.
- Weak engagement with private sector actors – including actors engaged in consumptive land-use (forest, forest risk commodities, mining) and actors engaged in voluntary carbon markets.
- Lack of engagement of UN-REDD at a political level - focus is increasingly technical - supporting solving problems of a technical nature, rather than a broader dialogue on political choices and options

- Inability to engage sufficiently with non-forest sectors at country level.
- Financing gaps between readiness and implementation / RBPs mean that momentum is lost and structures such as secretariats are disbanded and associated capacity is either lost or fragmented.
- Inability to provide strategic focus on key areas.

### 3.5 Niche and added-value

The review attempted to identify UN-REDD’s unique niche and added value. Key messages included its demand-driven, tailored support and technical expertise aligned with Warsaw Framework requirements; the programme’s ability to connect to a wider network of support (peers, service providers, financing); trust exhibited by forest countries following the long relationships developed with UN agencies and UN-REDD’s ability to convene both government and non-governmental stakeholders. The fact that UN-REDD worked in support of forest countries and did not actively seek to promote itself, but rather communicate results from partners was identified as a key niche by a number of stakeholders consulted. However, it was also pointed out that this apparent “invisibility” was a weakness in a world where there is increased competition between actors, all vying for attention from forest countries and donors alike. Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

#### **Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- Convening power - which is different from other actors (such as WB – FCPF, who are seen as having a particular focus or agenda)
- Close and long-term relationship with governments from forest countries. Trust has been built
- Ability to provide quality TA across wide range of subjects. But concerns that TA field getting crowded - so this will need clarification (see earlier point)
- Links back to UNFCCC - which is seen as legitimate and international process, rather than more top-down initiatives from WB, LEAF

#### **Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- Tailored country-level support to meet requirements of UNFCCC Warsaw Framework.
- Helping countries connect to a wider network of support (peers, other donors and service providers)
- Technical expertise of agencies (such as FAO on FREL, MRV, NFMS); UNDP on safeguards, gender, governance.
- Unbiased, neutral position of UN-REDD (not aligned with any particular system or set of standards other than those agreed through UNFCCC)

### 3.6 Engagement of non-state actors

UN-REDD is recognised for its support to forest countries during their readiness phase, when government and non-state actors (including representatives of IPLCs) were supported to engage in joint meetings on readiness pillars, such as the development of REDD+ strategies, safeguards and MRV. In the context of National Programmes, funding was made available to convene multi-

stakeholder processes (and in some cases provide direct support to non-state actor organisations) at which key readiness outcomes could be discussed and agreed. Following the closure of National Programmes (in large part due to declining donor support) in the late 2010s, the main modality switched to Technical Assistance. As the primary beneficiaries of this support channel was national government agencies, there were few, if any, opportunities to support non-state actors through the programme other than at the level of the Executive Board. Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

**Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- Initially, very strong support for engaging with CS, IPLCs during the initial phases and when UN-REDD had funds from National Programmes. UN-REDD instrumental for putting CSOs and IPLCs on the national agenda and opening space for them.
- In many Latin American countries - worked with IP Organisations to understand and support traditional structures and processes, rather than creating new ones.
- UN-REDD has been a strong advocate for the importance of safeguards - and working with countries to operationalise this.
- More recently, engagement with non-state actors has declined - much more focus on technical problem-solving and linking to finance. Primary focus more recently has been to work with government agencies only.
- Concerns from CS around Benefit Sharing are not being adequately heard or communicated.
- Need to empower local organisations with finance - rather than channelling just TA or support through other organisations. IPLC organisations in particular

**Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- Generally, National Programmes were instrumental in helping open dialogue between state and non-state actors
- In some countries with limited political space, UN-REDD created new opportunities for civil society to engage with governments
- In Latin American countries, in particular, UN-REDD was able to engage with and support Indigenous Peoples and their own organisations to raise awareness on REDD+ and ensure that concerns (particularly related to their forest tenure rights) were communicated.

### 3.7 Impacts

Unlike many other international programmes supporting REDD+, UN-REDD does not deliver field-level impacts and tangible REDD+ results (in the form of reduced emissions or reduced deforestation). Rather, it supports and enables countries to achieve these goals and facilitates linkages to those sources of finance and support that will enable these results to take place. UN-REDD works in support of existing processes rather than starting new ones. As such getting a clear assessment of UN-REDD impacts is very challenging given the uncertainty over attribution and contribution. Despite this, there are clear outcomes over which UN-REDD can claim a clear contribution. These include:

- Building the capacity of forest countries, facilitating the establishment of REDD+ readiness;
- Supporting the transfer of emerging knowledge and best practice from across the REDD+ community of practice
- Engagement of non-state actors in multi-stakeholder processes around REDD+ building blocks
- Raising ambition on NDCs
- Helping partner countries access results-based finance

Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

**Key points from external stakeholders  
(interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- Hard to assess impacts as UN-REDD supports and facilitates but does not deliver results on the ground. It enables others to do this themselves. Works in support of existing processes - not starting new ones. Attribution and contribution are very difficult to identify conclusively.
- Two important result areas for UN-REDD. Firstly: Capacity development, particularly for government staff in forest countries. Associated with this is the sharing of lessons and knowledge between countries. Secondly: Helping countries understand, internalise and establish the Warsaw Framework for REDD+ readiness.

**Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations  
(carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- Main impacts have been related to delivering REDD+ readiness in conformity with UNFCCC guidance and supporting countries to access other sources of external financing for results-based actions.
- There is a need to be clear about what we mean by "impact". UN-REDD does not provide investment finance - it supports, facilitates and enables. While there is a contribution to reduced deforestation, this link is weaker than in other comparable global programmes like FCPF

### 3.8 Efficiency

Overall, there was an appreciation of the broad range of complementary technical assistance offers from across the three UN agencies, encompassing both “hard” TA needs (MRV, FREL, NFMS) and “soft” needs (gender, safeguards, governance, finance). However, an ongoing concern from forest countries, particularly from the era of National Programmes, that UN-REDD was not “delivering as one”. During this period, UN-REDD placed high transaction costs on partner countries given that each UN agency had its own distinct systems, administrative and financial requirements and arrangements. This undermined efficiency. With the advent of Technical Assistance replacing National Programmes, this is perceived as less of an issue, as funds are retained by the agencies and not disbursed to partner countries. Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

**Key points from external stakeholders  
(interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- On one hand - appreciation of the multi-sectoral technical support from UN-REDD across a range of issues such as MRV, NFMS, Safeguards, Governance, Policies and Measures, Finance. And efficient from the perspective of being demand-driven
- However, consistent concerns across all consulted regarding the complexity of interacting with three large, cumbersome organizations – during the era of National Programmes (2010 – 2017). No (or little) integration of systems or processes - all run in parallel. High transaction costs for participating countries relative to funds released - almost equivalent to three separate projects. Concerns that UN-REDD is not "Delivering as One".
- Co-ordination between agencies varies from country to country - often down to

**Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- The lack of a single country-level plan and theory of change has undermined opportunities for efficiency. There are many cases of fragmented, agency-by-agency workplans at country level.
- Three different agencies operating with three different administrative and finance systems undermines efficiency.
- There is a lack of transparency regarding how resources are shared between the three implementing agencies.
- Competition between three UN agencies over resources and inefficiencies caused by different systems and administrative requirements of different agencies.
- Unresolved questions remain over the trade-offs between "leave no one behind" philosophy and focusing on countries with highest ER potential and delivering maximum impacts.
- There was an under-estimation of the time required to complete different outputs in almost all countries. The time period envisaged for

the individual personality of the persons involved, rather than institutional mechanisms that allow this to happen systematically

National Programmes (3 years) has proven to be too short - more time was needed

- Challenges faced by many countries in securing bridging finance between readiness and RBP

### 3.9 Governance

The former Policy Board was established at the start of the UN-REDD programme but was transitioned into the Executive Board in around 2017, following a decline in donor funding to UN-REDD. The Executive Board remains in place and remains the overall governance body for UN-REDD at international level. A number of stakeholders (particularly non-state actors) expressed some concern over the lack of clarity regarding the role, mandate and authority of the EB, particularly when donor budgets tend to be tightly earmarked with limited real opportunity for flexibility. Furthermore, some country-level and non-state actors expressed a concern that while the membership of the EB is quite balanced, donors are received to have proportionately more decision-making power over the direction and operations of the programme. Members of the EB felt that there was a need for two clear functions or roles of a governance body at international level. Firstly, a decision-making function (including the review and approval of workplans, budgets and strategy) and secondly a dialogue and exchange between donors, forest countries, non-state actors. It is unlikely that these two functions can effectively be managed within one single body.

Formerly, under FCPF, the Participants Committee and Participants Assembly provided a unique opportunity for southern governments, civil society, private sector and donor countries to engage in dialogue and exchange experience. With the transition of FCPF Readiness Fund to the Carbon Fund, these global platforms were discontinued and replaced by the Carbon Fund meetings, which have a much narrower focus (primarily represented through 'contributors' or those providing financing to the Carbon Fund). Given the gap left by the institutional structures under FCPF, UN-REDD has a unique possibility of convening a global platform with broad representation with which to foster dialogue between supply and demand countries. Key points from external consultations and previous UN-REDD evaluations are presented below:

#### **Key points from external stakeholders (interviewed between July – October 2024)**

- The move from Policy Board (PB) to Executive Board (EB) was rational given the limited amount of finance available. But now that entering a new phase, with potentially more donors, there is a sense that it should be expanded again, with greater representation from forest countries and non-state actors.
- The role, function and mandate of EB is not clear to all members. While it does approve workplan and budget on an annual basis, this tends to be more of a formality as donor budgets are usually quite inflexible. There has been little real discussion of strategy or future direction, although this was welcomed in the October 2024 meeting in Rome.
- There is a perception from civil society representatives that while membership of EB is quite balanced, donors have the greatest say.

#### **Key points from UN-REDD Evaluations (carried out between 2013 – 2020)**

- The complexity of the UN-REDD governance structure is generally considered essential for maintaining trust amongst UN partner agencies and across the Programme's diverse range of constituencies, but it also creates high transaction costs, delays in implementation, and administrative redundancies. The Programme's overlapping structures make it difficult to track the rationale for decisions and establish linkages between proposed interventions and programmatic objectives.

- There is a need to clarify and perhaps distinguish two roles - decision-making and oversight functions, and a forum for wider dialogue, exchange of experiences and building of trust between countries and donors

## 4 Conclusions

The overall conclusions of this review are presented below.

**The review found that the UN-REDD programme has been and remains highly relevant to the needs of forest countries.** It has been able to adapt its approach in response to a rapidly changing operating environment. Support provided to partner countries has been foundational in nature, providing countries with the basic building blocks that allow further development of national and jurisdictional-level REDD+ programmes. Going forward, UN-REDD will need to consider a number of factors in terms of its scope and offer to forest countries – including engaging with broader drivers of land-use change, including agriculture and mining; working with non-forest agencies that have links to land-use and land-use change; clarifying roles and responsibilities with regard to provision of technical assistance and engaging more broadly on issues of governance and political economy, rather than a narrower technical focus on tools and methods.

**With regard to the theory of change, the review found that much has changed since the development of the original theory of change for the UN-REDD Programme.** This includes the time taken for countries to become REDD+ ready, the capacity and financing gaps that exist within partner country governments and the limited availability (and increasing complexity) of results-based finance for REDD+. More thinking will be required with regard to distilling UN-REDD's vision with regard to 2030 – in particular the composition of the carbon market, and the role of public and private finance.

**UN-REDD has a number of key strengths.** These include the close and clear links to the UNFCCC Warsaw Framework; the multi-level nature of the programme, working at global, regional and country levels; facilitation of South-South linkages and learning; strong technical assistance capacity across a wide range of areas and its ability to broker and establish linkages to results-based finance.

**The review identified some areas of weakness.** Key among these was the apparent drop in engagement with non-state actors when transitioning from National Programmes to Targeted Support and Technical Assistance modalities. Concerns have been raised from civil society actors that in the understandable emphasis on supporting countries to access results-based finance, there is a risk that civil society actors are left behind, which may in turn jeopardise long term legitimacy and support

**UN-REDD has been able to develop an important niche and added value when compared to other global REDD+ programmes.** Its demand-driven nature providing tailored national support in conformity with UNFCCC decisions has ensured that it is viewed favourably by forest countries. It has helped countries establish new relationships to other complementary sources of finance and technical assistance. It has retained its neutrality, in line with UN identity, and as such is not seen as being aligned to any one set of standards or financing channels, other than the UNFCCC. Its neutrality and credibility has meant that it has significant convening power – being able to bring together diverse stakeholders who otherwise would not necessarily meet.

**Efficiency has been mixed.** On one hand, the complementary areas of expertise of the three UN agencies have meant that countries can draw on a broad pool of knowledge across a wide range of areas. However, and in particular in relation to support provided through National Programmes, forest countries reported complex, cumbersome and inefficient ways of working, fragmented across the three agencies, which raised transaction costs.

**The Executive Board operates relatively effectively, but greater clarity is required with regard its role function and mandate.** With the prospect of additional financing in the 2026 – 2030 period, revisiting membership and representation may also be advisable.

## 5 Recommendations

The review has raised a number of key findings and conclusions across all the evaluation questions posed. A summary of recommendations arising from these findings are presented below. These recommendations are principally directed to the UN-REDD Secretariat and UN-REDD Management Group, who have the responsibility for preparing the 2026-2030 UN-REDD Strategy

### 5.1 Relevance, coherence and theory of change

- Expand the focus of UN-REDD support to include land-use change and the forestry-agriculture interface, given the increased prominence of deforestation drivers outside the forest sector
- Clarify and agree the criteria for country selection in the new phase. There is an apparent tension between the need to “leave no one behind” on one hand and work with those countries with the greatest ER potential.
- Clarify the role and niche of UN-REDD with regard to technical assistance. This could involve more proactive collaboration with other TA providers, providing a coordination role of TA providers in support of national governments and engaging across the full spectrum of Results based finance.

### 5.2 Effectiveness

- Build on the successes of National Programmes (country ownership, in-country presence, focus on policy reform and governance, support to non-state actors, trust-building, multi-year support) and ensure that support goes beyond forest agencies to non-forest institutions and actors.
- Find ways to provide more support to IPLC actors. This could be through direct support (perhaps through intermediaries) or helping IPLC organizations access sources of climate finance directly.
- Ensure governance remains a core area of support, including through the development of in-country multi-stakeholder platforms and processes facilitated through a modified version of National Programme support.
- Engage more directly with private sector actors – both Voluntary Carbon Market actors and networks, but also operators working on agricultural commodities in forest countries (palm oil, rubber, soya)

### 5.3 Efficiency

- Work towards reducing transaction costs for partner countries through rationalized and harmonized arrangements for finance and administration of funds by UN agencies (“delivering as one”)

### 5.4 Impact and added-value

- Communicate more effectively UN-REDD’s impact, added value and niche from the perspective of forest countries.

### 5.5 Programme governance

- Clarify and document the role and mandate of the Executive Board. Ensure membership is sufficiently broad to reflect this mandate effectively.
- Building on UN-REDD’s convening ability, develop global and regional platforms for building trust and dialogue between forest countries and buyers of REDD+ credits (both governmental and private sector) Investigate partnerships with FCLP, UNFCCC and FCPF/SCALE

## **Annex 1: Key documents consulted for this review**

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- Howard Stewart and Steven Swan. 2013. Final Evaluation of the UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme
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- Juan Luis Larraburre. 2015. Final Evaluation of the UN-REDD Solomon Islands Support Programme. Support to Initial Readiness.

## Annex 2: Persons consulted

<b>Representatives from forest countries</b>		
Alfred Gichu	Kenya Forest Service, Government of Kenya	REDD+ Focal Person (retired)
Berioska Quipe	Ministry of Environment, Government of Peru	General Director of Climate Change
Jorge Zuniga	National Forest Finance Fund Government of Costa Rica	Director General
Xavier Mugumya	Ministry of Water and Environment, Government of Uganda	Coordinator Climate Change and Alternate National Focal Point REDD+
Nur Masripatin	Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of Indonesia	National Focal Point (NFP) for UNFCCC
Adriana Rivera Brusatin	Ministry of Environment, Government of Colombia	Director and Forests, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
Rijatahiana Haingomanantsoa	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Government of Madagascar	REDD+ Focal Person
María Teresa Becerra	Ministry of Environment, Government of Colombia	Head of International Affairs
Jerson Gonzalez	Ministry of Environment, Government of Colombia	Technical Adviser
<b>Donor representatives</b>		
Victoria Situ	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, UK government	Senior Policy Advisor and Programme Manager – Forest Carbon Finance, LEAF Coalition, International Forests Unit (DESNZ and FCDO)
Lizzie Rowe	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, UK government	Programme manager
Leif John Fosse	Norwegian International Climate and Forests Initiative	Senior Adviser
Pierre-Andre Cordey	Swiss Development Co-operation Government of Switzerland	Technical officer - Forests
Keith Anderson	Federal Office of the Environment, Government of Switzerland	Senior Adviser for International Forest Policy
Soo-Hwan Kim	Korea Forest Service, Government of Korea	Programme Officer in REDD+ Team. Focal Point for UN-REDD
Woori Lee	Korea Forest Service, Government of Korea	Assistant Director, REDD+ Policy
<b>Representatives from civil society and IPLCs</b>		

David Gantz	Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC), Bangkok, Thailand.	Executive Director
Lola Cabnal	Red Mujeres, Mexico	IPLC Representative (Latin America) UN-REDD Executive Board
Gustavo Sanchez Valle	Red Mexicana de Organizaciones Forestales Campesinas	Director
<b>UN-REDD Strategy Group</b>		
Mirey Atallah	UNEP	Chief of the Adaptation and Resilience Branch, Climate Change Division
Tiina Vahanen	FAO	Deputy Director of the Forestry Division
Josep Gari	UNDP	Senior Policy Advisor, UN-REDD & GIORNI Focal Point
<b>United Nations Implementing partners and MG representatives</b>		
Wahida Shah	UNDP	Senior Technical Advisor
Elsbeth Halverson	UNDP	Programme and Partnership Management Advisor
Marco Chiu	UNDP	Global Technical Specialist on Policies and Investments
Clea Paz	UNDP	Senior Programme Manager, NYDF Global Platform
Kin Yii Yong	UNDP	Regional Technical Advisor and Stakeholder Engagement Specialist, Asia and the Pacific
Kimberly Todd	UNDP	Global Technical Advisor, MRV & UNFCCC
Jose Arturo Santos	UNDP	Regional Technical Advisor and Stakeholder Engagement Specialist, Latin America and the Caribbean
Leticia Guimaraes	UNDP	Global Lead, Carbon Markets
Elizabeth Eggerts	UNDP	REDD and Gender Specialist
Katrina Borromeo	UNEP	Communication Officer, UNEP UN-REDD KM and Communications Coordinator
Gabriella Flores	UNEP	Programme Management Officer, UNEP UN-REDD Finance and Private Sector Engagement Coordinator
Annette Walgren	UNEP	Programme Management Officer, UNEP UN-REDD Asia-Pacific Regional Coordinator

Judith Walcott	UNEP	Programme Management Officer, UNEP UN-REDD LAC Regional Coordinator
Maminiaina Rasamoelina	UNEP	Programme Management Officer, UNEP UN-REDD Africa Regional Coordinator
Gabriel Labatte	UNEP	Senior Programme Management Officer, Head of Climate Change Mitigation Unit, UNEP
Sweet Mae Monteclaro	UNEP	Senior Programme Assistant, UNEP UN-REDD head of operations
Steven Swan	UNEP	Programme Management Officer, UNEP/UN-REDD Global Programme Manager
Mariangela Bagnardi	FAO	Operations Coordinator
Jose Carlos Fernandez	FAO	Consultant on REDD policy and finance
Serena Fortuna	FAO	Senior Forestry Officer - Halting deforestation, degradation and emissions Team Leader
Amanda Bradley -	FAO	Specialist on tenure, gender, and indigenous peoples for REDD+
<b>UN-REDD Secretariat</b>		
Mario Boccucci	UN-REDD Secretariat / UNEP	Head
Chandra Manalu	UN-REDD Secretariat / UNEP	Programme Management Officer
Avishan Chanani	UN-REDD Secretariat / UNEP	Consultant, External Relations and Resource Mobilisation
Mihaela Secrieru	UN-REDD Secretariat / UNEP	Programme Management Officer
Sharon MCAuslan	UN-REDD Secretariat / UNEP	Consultant, Programme Management and Resource Mobilisation