



Evaluation of the Nature Action Subprogramme (NA-SP) 2014-2025

[From 2026 – Nature Action: land, ocean and freshwater]

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Subprogramme evaluations

2026	2027	2028	2029
Finance & Economic Transformations <i>(covering 8 years; 2018 Resource Efficiency to 2025)</i>	Science-Policy <i>(covering 6 years; 2020 - 2025)</i>	Environmental Law and Governance <i>(covering 6 years; 2022-27)</i>	Digital Transformations <i>(covering 6 years; 2023-28)</i>

- Each Subprogramme evaluated every 6 years, ST/AI/2021/3 (effective 2021)
- UNEP responses to recommendations monitored by Evaluation Office for compliance for 18 months (i.e. currently tracking recommendations from *Formative Evaluation of Delivery Model* and *Chemicals and Pollution Action Subprogramme*)
- *Nature Action SP*: focus on priority issues related to protecting natural assets and responding to global priorities, including nexus issues such as food security, climate action, sustainable livelihoods and responses to environmental crises.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews / Focus Groups

48 people interviewed across UNEP

Staff survey of 75 project

managers/coordinators (48% response rate)

Analysis of Project Evaluations

85 completed evaluations

Portfolio Analysis

288 projects (GEF and non-GEF)

Case Studies Analysis

10 case studies

Document review

MTS , PoWs, PPRs, Quarterly Reports, Annual Reports; Analytical assessments and others.

Areas of focus

- I. Strategic relevance
- II. Coherence of the NA-SP design and structure
- III. Effectiveness: Meta-analysis of project-level performance
- IV. Efficiency
- V. Likelihood of Impact
- VI. Sustainability
- VII. Factors affecting sub-programme performance: coherence and integration; partnerships; gender, youth and inclusion

Includes 7 strategic cross-cutting questions

Gradual evolution of the SP-NA

MTS 2014–17: Ecosystem Management

MTS 2018–21: Healthy and Productive Ecosystems

MTS 2022–25: Nature Action

- **2014-17** focus on technical assistance related to country specific issues of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, ecosystem management, and environmental governance, anchored in national legislative and institutional capacity-building.
- **2018-21** shift to wider ecosystem sustainable management and policy integration, linking natural resource management with national development plans, sustainable land and water use and strongly aligned with the SDGs and MEA priorities.
- **2022-25** greater emphasis on nexus-driven/transformational agenda, connecting biodiversity with food systems, climate adaptation and sustainable livelihoods.
- Strongly aligned with major **international environmental frameworks** - Kunming Montreal (KM-GBF); National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs); Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)
Supports revision/alignment of the national biodiversity targets and implementation of NBSAPS

Relevance

- Clear policy alignment to KM-GBF implementation through NBSAP support
- MEA synergies via mechanisms such as the Bern Process and DaRT reporting tool
- Focus on policy influence: legislative reforms (e.g. wildlife laws via Conservation Caucus Network, water policy reform in Pacific SIDS, invasive species management strategies in the Caribbean, and conservation campaigns in the Andes)

Constraint: limited linkage of project outcomes and learning back to high level NA-SP results in the POW/MTS. UNEP work recognized, but reduced strategic visibility for Subprogramme work.

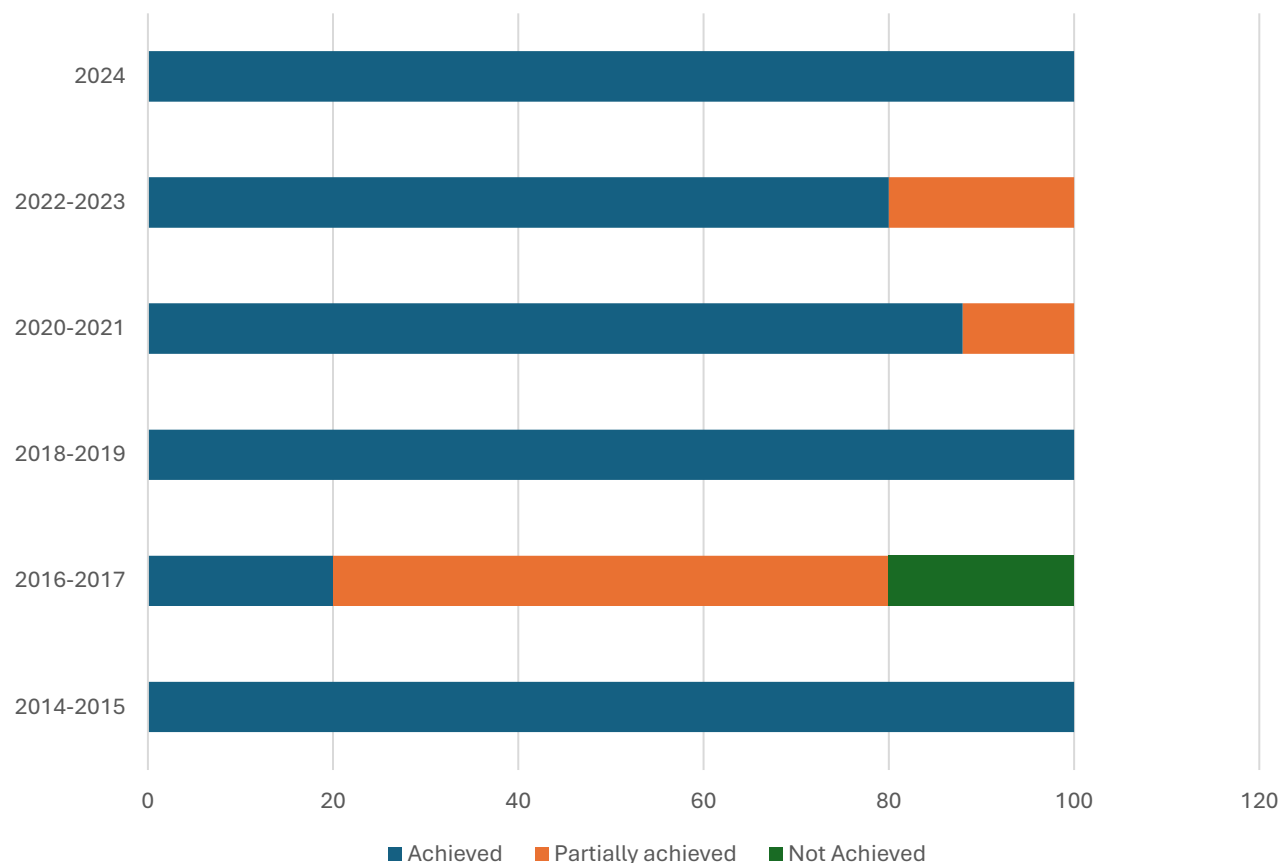
Coherence (and coordination)

- In this SP, Programme Coordination Projects (PCPs) assisted consultation and coordination within UNEP and led to some reported joint activities (e.g. technical advice across SPs – funds for project design motivated work across Divisions) in line with MTS priorities
- Implementation within the NA-SP remains dispersed and largely reliant on informal (i.e. not institutionalized or systematised) coordination
- Integration with other subprogrammes improving but not systematic

Constraint: demand-driven (i.e. donor funding priorities) and/or partner-led project designs.

Effectiveness – Subprogramme level

NA-SP Performance 2014-2024



SP target achievements, according to PPR, is consistently satisfactory

2016-2017 indicators (11) were more challenging to attain

Indicators are overall very broad and more easily attainable

Likelihood of impact not clearly tracked

Positive indications of results come from qualitative and triangulated information

SP-NA: indicators of achievement (PPRs 2014-2024)

Effectiveness – project level

- Specific achievements include: shaping global biodiversity finance dialogues, advancing MEA synergies and embedding ecosystem-based adaptation in specific countries
- Positive results in innovation, lesson sharing, mainstreaming sustainable practices, and conservation
- Slightly higher overall performance by thematic-focused, medium sized projects covering a number of selected countries with common priorities than small and single country projects or very large global projects
- Factors include: clearer technical focus and results chain, multi-year budgets, the ability to adapt project operations to different country contexts and timeframes and the ability to operate more efficiently with a project team with targeted technical and project management capability.

Efficiency (and size of portfolio)

- Annual budget grew from USD 143 million in 2014 to over USD 204 million in 2024 - real net increase even when inflation is factored.
- Good leverage of partnership funds - a current combined portfolio value of USD 1.4 billion.
- GEF (2024) supported 240 projects with a combined value of USD 769 million (64% of portfolio \$ value, 83% # of projects)
- Overall, high financial expenditure rates across projects
- Internal procedures for allocating funds create bottlenecks that lead to rushed implementation to achieve deadlines

Constraint: short delivery timelines reduce ability to achieve outcome-level results, but extensions reduce efficiency.

Contributions to impact

- Strong partnerships in implementation of MEA commitments
- Institutional strengthening, governance for nature action
- Mainstreaming biodiversity into national planning
- Protecting vulnerable ecosystems and species
- Increasing number of financial institutions setting biodiversity targets, particularly with UNEP-FI (IE Division)
- Developing key tools, including the MPA toolbox, DART (with EG Division), decision-support frameworks used, but most useful if adjusted to context

Constraint: weak results frameworks and design/resource allocation for monitoring

Sustainability

- Higher sustainability where interventions are embedded in national policies and institutional frameworks
- Stronger performance where linked to livelihoods (e.g. ecosystem-based adaptation projects)

Constraints:

- Financial sustainability constrained by reliance on external funds
- Scaling pathways are not systematically designed or funded

Lessons

- **Partnerships** are a defining strength of the NA-SP, particularly with MEA secretariats, vertical funds, NGOs, academia, and UN agencies.
- **Results** are strongest where interventions are embedded in national frameworks, respond to explicit country demand, and are supported by sustained partnerships.
- **Pilots** generate success but lack mechanisms and resources to move beyond project-level achievements towards larger scale results and knowledge sharing
- The NA-SP has generated a substantial **body of evidence, tools, and knowledge products**, yet monitoring, evaluation, learning, and knowledge management are under-utilised as strategic assets.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

- Strong science-policy integration and alignment in design
- Focus on contribution to global frameworks, clear focus on contribution to SDGs 6, 14, and 15 in design.
- Inclusion of pilots designed to be innovative and catalytic (e.g. in ecosystem restoration, invasive species control, NBSAP integration).

Weaknesses:

- Insufficient clarity in the SP portfolio's strategic priorities
- Over-ambitious scope (i.e. breadth) across all thematic areas, also within single projects
- Weak results frameworks and design/resource allocation for monitoring
- Insufficient duration for behavioural and institutional change

Conclusion

- NA-SP delivers strong project-level results aligned with global biodiversity frameworks. (*Performance is consistently satisfactory across evaluation criteria*)
- However, broad scope/diversity and weak integration limit system-level impact
- Likelihood of impact is insufficiently articulated/traceable at subprogramme level despite evidence at project level
- Knowledge management not currently functioning as a strategic asset for adaptive management.

Recommendations

1. Sharpen focus in operations in line with the NA-SP priorities by targeting fewer, high-impact thematic areas consistent with a nexus-driven agenda.
2. Institutionalize integration across UNEP subprogrammes, MEAs and UN agency collaboration to strengthen coordination practices and for knowledge sharing.
3. Leverage proven and promising partnerships for country and regional impact through a stronger regional role for the NA-SP.
4. Strengthen vertical fund engagement at early stages of MTS and NA-SP PoW, reducing future resource risks and complementing wider NA-SP objectives.
5. Strengthen MEL knowledge as a strategic subprogramme asset and as a growing body of knowledge for biodiversity outcomes

Thank you



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